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ABSTRACT

A case study was conducted of the organized, cooperative efforts of women in six communities in Bolivia. From December 1978 through January 1988, visits were made to women's organizations called "mothers' clubs." Effects of club membership on members, their families, and their communities were examined. A research review showed that: (1) women can identify their own needs and solve their own problems; (2) women around the world have many of the same concerns; and (3) a definite, two-way process emerges from women's empowerment whereby their efforts to help others result in benefits to themselves. Data were obtained through talking with individuals in clubs, conversations and clarifications with interpreters, and participant observation. These data showed consistency among the six mothers' clubs in organization, running of meetings, concentration on activities to improve families' lives, and concern for sharing responsibility and taking part in joint efforts. Data analysis indicated the groups manifested the characteristics of self-help groups and were vehicles by which women empowered themselves in seven areas: self-esteem, health, political action, housing, economic well-being, literacy and education, and appropriate technology. Through the clubs, women raised the standard of living for their communities, their families, and themselves. (62 references) (YLB)

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SELF-CAPACITATING ACTIVITIES OF MOTHERS' CLUBS
OF PRIMARILY INDIGENOUS MEMBERSHIP IN BOLIVIA

BY

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A.B., University of Illinois, 1971

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Human Resources and Family Studies
in the Graduate College of the
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the five family members who have been steadfast and supportive throughout the course of this work: to my three children, William Beecher Baker, Helen Zivar Baker, and David Allyn Baker, and to my mother and late father, Portia Allyn Smith and George Edward Smith, Sr. In a very real sense it is our research and report, not just mine. Their diligent and patient care for all that interested me, and their suggestions, love, and unflagging assistance have been very much appreciated. Their attention and care have been the balm that provided encouragement, comfort, and assurance through more than just these four years.

I sincerely thank them for their love, their understanding, their support, and their consultation.

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1988. I thank them for their time, their energy, and their insights into community affairs in Bolivia.

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To many others who taught me, debated with me, shared information and time, and wished me well through these years, I thank you all. The time was well-spent.

Preface

In order to honor the trust of the various people in Bolivia who spoke so freely with me about the clubs to which they belonged, I am not naming individuals or giving exact locations of meeting sites. In many cases, such identification of people and locations might prove detrimental to the natural development of the clubs I visited. Only approximate whereabouts are given. In order to avoid any inter-personal or political difficulties for the people involved, I have taken care to be a little vague about some of the conditions surrounding the club meetings and exact business topics to preserve a degree of anonymity.

I have accurately identified the districts in which I worked.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis is a case study of the organized, cooperative efforts of women in six communities in Bolivia, South America. From December 20, 1987, to January 24, 1988, I visited women's organizations called "mothers' clubs" in Cochabamba, Villa Moscu, Somos, La Loma, Coripati, and El Torno. During the five-week stay, I was able to meet with six different groups to observe their meetings, talk with individual members and officers, and inquire about the experiences that club members had had with their families, friends and other contacts.

My purpose in examining the activities of these women was to study the effects of club membership on the club members, their families, and their communities. What I discovered was far beyond what I had imagined in terms of how local, voluntarily-organized clubs can affect the lives of the people who organize and belong to them. Through the cooperative activities of these essentially grassroot, self-help organizations, the women empowered themselves. In addition, I found that as the women participated in the group activities, they were able to develop their own talents and skills in ways that allowed them to have even greater impact upon their communities. This two-way process of helping others and thus empowering themselves is the topic that this thesis explores in depth.

These particular clubs fall into the category of self-help groups. They allowed the women who belonged to them to gain personal skills and to help their communities prosper in identifiable ways: in improved health care, through better education, through better organized and more effective community projects, and through better use of proffered government services. I have extracted eleven ways in which participation in these six clubs has permanently changed and enhanced the lives of the individual women belonging to them.

Self-Help Groups

The term "self-help," as defined by Gartner and Reissman (1977, 6), refers to "service-oriented mutual aid groups." Gartner and Reissman expand the concept by citing Katz and Bender's (1976, 6) description of self-help groups as "[v]oluntary small group structures for mutual aid in the accomplishment of a specific purpose. They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change." Gartner and Reissman (1977, 7) list six characteristics of self-help groups that distinguish them from other kinds of unions and organizations.

1) Self-help groups are characterized by "face-to-face interactions." 2) The groups begin spontaneously, not because of outside assistance. 3) The individuals participate themselves—not through a system of representatives or bureaucratic control. 4) The participants decide upon and undertake actions together. 5) Self-help groups are often begun by individuals who have little or no power or influence. 6) The groups become a source of identification and a foundation for activities and personal growth.

I will show that the mothers' clubs that I visited in Bolivia fall into the category of self-help groups as Katz and Bender define them. All six characteristics are evident in the mothers' clubs as they are organized.

Before describing these clubs and the activities and achievements of their members, I would like to present some background information on Bolivia's history and people. Such contextual information will help the reader better appreciate the obstacles that the women of these groups needed to overcome in order to improve conditions in their communities.

The Country of Bolivia

This land-locked South American country is still battling to overcome centuries of economic and technological deprivation. This section will present a brief look at the oppressive rule of the ancient Incas, the continued suffering for the indigenous population

at the hands of the Spanish *conquistadores*, followed by a century of military rule at the hands of Spanish descendents who were Bolivian born and reared. Emerging from this picture will be a better understanding for the reader of why Bolivia is one of the poorest countries on the continent, struggling to raise the standard of living for its largely rural, indigenous population.

Bolivia's nearly 1,099,000 square kilometer area (over 424,000 square miles) is divided among *altiplano*, mountain valley, and jungle lands. A study of the topography shows a country with areas of vastly different climates, soil types, and rainfall. Much of the land in river valleys is heavily populated, at low and middle altitudes and high in the *altiplano*. Bolivia's economy is based on agriculture. In 1980, 50 percent of the population was employed in agriculture and only 24 and 26 percent, respectively, in industry and in services. Only 45 percent of the population, in 1982, lived in urban centers. (See Table 1 below.)

Table 1.
Population and Employment Sector Statistics for Bolivia

Category	Statistic	Page Number in Source
square kilometers/miles	1,099,000/424,000	218
labor force in agriculture	50 percent	258
labor force in industry	24 percent	258
labor force in services	26 percent	258
population in urban areas	45 percent	260

(Source: *World Development Report*, 1984)

As Table 2 below shows, the population of Bolivia is about 7 million, with a projected average annual growth rate of 2.4 percent. The total fertility rate for 1982 was 6.3 percent, with a projected decline to 4.2 percent by the year 2000. Life expectancy for Bolivian

women (at birth) is 53 years, and for men is 49 years (*World Development Report*, 1984, 218, 256, and 262). [Compare this with Sivard's figures for world-wide female life expectancy at birth, estimated at 66 years, and her estimate of Bolivian female life expectancy at 55 years, eleven years *below* the world average (1985, 6).]

Table 2.

General Population Statistics for Bolivia

Category	Statistic	Page Number in Source
Current Population	7 million	254
Projected average annual growth rate	2.4 percent	254
Total fertility rate (1982)	6.3 percent	256
Projected total fertility rate	4.2 percent	254
Life expectancy for women	53 years	262
Life expectancy for men	49 years	262

(Source: *World Development Report*, 1984)

In Bolivia, the average number of people sharing the services of a trained physician was 3,830. There were 4,170 people for every trained nursing professional. The infant mortality rate in 1982 of 126 per thousand births (compared to 11 for the United States in the same year) is nearly as high as the 133/1000 rate for Bangladesh. The number of children per thousand who die between the ages of 1 to 4 is 22 in Bolivia, compared with 19 in Bangladesh and a fraction of a whole in the United States (*World Development Report*, 1984, 262). These figures are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.
General Health Statistics for Bolivia

Category	Statistic	Page Number in Source
Average number of people per physician	3,830	264
Average number of people per nurse	4,170	264
Infant mortality rate per thousand	126	262
Child death rate, ages 1-4, per thousand	22	262

(Source: *World Development Report*, 1984)

In 1981, the percentages of males and females enrolled in primary school (as a percentage of their age groups) were 93 and 78, respectively. The number similarly enrolled in secondary school for the population as a whole was 34 percent, with 12 percent of the population aged 20-24 enrolled in higher education (*World Development Report*, 1984, 266). We see that significant gains have been made in adult literacy for both men and women, from 1960 to 1985, and that women are approaching a literacy rate more equal to men's (see Table 4 below).

Table 4.
Education and Literacy Statistics for Bolivia

Category	Percentage of Age Group	Page Number in Source
Females enrolled in primary school	78	266
Males enrolled in primary school	93	266
All students enrolled in secondary school	34	266
All students age 20-24 enrolled in higher education	12	266

Category	Percentage of Age Group	Page Number in Source
Adult literacy for women in 1960	30	39
Adult literacy for women in 1985	65	39
Adult literacy for men in 1960	48	39
Adult literacy for men in 1985	84	39
Ratio of women's to men's rate in 1960	62	39
Ratio of women's to men's rate in 1985	77	39

(Source: Sivard, 1985.)

Finally, Sivard supplies comparative figures on literacy rates that show Bolivia's great lag behind the averages of other Latin American countries. While 65 percent of Bolivian women were literate in 1985, 81 percent literacy was the average for all Latin American women combined. Comparing the rates to North American statistics, we see that Bolivia is far behind the 99 percent literacy rate for North American women in 1985 (see Table 5 below).

Table 5.
Literacy Statistics for Comparison

Category	Percentage of Age Group	Page Number in Source
Latin American average for women in 1960	63	39
Latin American average for women in 1985	81	39
Latin American average for men in 1960	70	39
Latin American average for men in 1985	85	39
Ratio of women's rate to men's in 1960	90	39
Ratio of women's rate to men's in 1985	95	39
North American average for women in 1960	98	39
North American average for women in 1985	99	39
North American average for men in 1960	97	39
North American average for men in 1985	99	39
Ratio of women's rate to men's in 1960	101	39
Ratio of women's rate to men's in 1985	100	39

(Source: Sivard, 1985.)

Keeping these current statistics in mind, let us look at the political history of Bolivia to discover factors that have caused the country to maintain its Third World status. A history of repression and imperialism has left a heavy mark on the people.

The History of Bolivia

The stratification of social and economic classes in Bolivia today is most apparent between the descendants of the Spanish conquerors and the descendants of the indigenous Indian nations. The Quechua and Aymara peoples, each of whom has a distinctive language and set of traditions, have been subjected to dictatorial and often repressive rule since 1000 B.C. At that time, judging from the immense ruins of an ancient civilization with its seat at Tiahuanaco in the northern *altiplano*, previously isolated localities were linked into regional areas that shared large-scale irrigation and advanced architectural projects. By 500 A.D., most of the highlands in the Andes were a part of that expansive civilization (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1970).

In the 1400s, the Incas began to take control of the entire area. Within a hundred years, they were the masters of an empire that extended 3200 kilometers (2000 miles) through present-day Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, western Bolivia, and northern Chile. That government, based on the divine right of the Inca and his descendants to rule all others, enslaved the other native populations. The common people were "managed" in such a way that the empire extracted labor and time for the benefit of the ruling class. The priests and Inca rulers gained by exploiting others.

When the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in 1532, they quickly subdued the Inca leadership at Cuzco and began their own exploitation of the land and people. There was little change in the everyday lives of the Quechua and Aymara peoples, however, when they exchanged Inca masters for the heavy-handed Spanish. The *conquistadores* killed the leaders of the old empire and appointed Spanish governors in their places. The Spanish language and the Catholic religion were introduced as settlement continued through the 1500s. In addition to maintaining the absolute rule that the Incas had enjoyed, the Spanish exploited the New World for silver resources— mining, shipping ore to the homeland, and confiscating priceless silver artifacts that the Incas had commissioned for their temples and cities.

The Spanish homeland maintained its stranglehold on the Indians for three centuries before the descendants of the original Spanish settlers decided to declare their independence from King Ferdinand VII. In 1825, after 15 years of almost constant warfare, Simón Bolívar and Antonio José de Sucre defeated the Spanish troops and established the republic of Bolivia (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1970).

Independence did not really usher in change for the Indians. Since the wealth and power had rested with others for centuries, nearly indelible attitudes of servitude and resignation were the lot of the oppressed Quechua and Aymara peoples. From independence in 1825, revolution and political turmoil were a constant factor in Bolivian politics. But the *campesinos*, powerless anyway, were virtually unaffected by the machinations of those in power.¹

The Land Reform of 1952-1953

A signal revolution occurred in 1952. Paz Estenssoro, backed by Hernán Siles Zuazo and mine-union leader Juan Lechín Oquendo, succeeded in overthrowing the military government of General Hugo Ballivián. Estenssoro had agreed before the coup to carry out social reforms that would improve the lives of the peasants. Almost immediately, all people were enfranchised and massive land reforms acts were mandated by law and swiftly executed. The wealthy Spanish landlords who had controlled productive land were ousted, along with the former military leaders who had once protected them (Espinoza, 1984). The large *haciendas* that had dominated the countryside, particularly in the *altiplano* and in the fertile river valleys, were given to the peasants who had worked them.²

The revolution of 1952 brought the greatest change in centuries to the enslaved peasants. In the past, they had received permission to work small plots of land for their own use in exchange for perpetual labor. Suddenly, through the force of civil law, they became land owners free to control the fruits of their own productivity. For purposes of the actual reform, all land holdings were divided into four categories. Based on their size from largest to smallest, *haciendas* were classified as *latifundia*, *agricultural enterprises*, *medium properties*, or *small properties*. Each category was divided among peasants and, in some cases, former owners, according to decisions of local "agrarian reform judges" appointed by the government. Their mandate, outlined under a nationally-accepted system of redistribution, was to determine which land holdings fell into which categories and to award ownership to peasants who had worked the land (Heath, Erasmus, and Buechler, 1969; Powelson and Stock, 1987).

For instance, the *latifundia*, large rural holdings in the *altiplano*, had operated according to a feudal system with compulsory labor. The *latifundia* were expropriated in full and subdivided into small plots for peasants who had formerly worked that land. In the other three categories, labor obligations were also abolished, and the peasants were given title to their own plots. Though these four classifications were not consistent everywhere, as

they were subject to the judgment of the local judges, land reform occurred in all parts of Bolivia. For twelve years, a relatively stable government maintained national control, and the changes in land ownership were established beyond recall.

It took many years for the *campesinos* to explore new economic opportunities. Power for the *hacienda* owners had been based on control of the most productive, common, Bolivian resource—land. The landlords had done their best to stifle any social and economic change that might have disrupted existing inequalities preferred by the privileged minority (Eckholm, 1979; Craig, 1977). The newly-freed peasants were handicapped by patterns maintained through generations of landlessness. We can better understand the implications of these patterns by studying Eckholm's assessment of what it means, in general, to be landless and economically powerless:

The landless, the insecure tenants, and those owning marginal plots too small to support a family together constitute nearly all the poorest of the poor—those whose basic needs for food, fuel, shelter, education, health care, and family planning are frequently unmet. It is in many cases they who are born into debt and die in debt, who see up to half their infants die before age five, who live chronically on a tightwire of survival from which they can quickly fall if the weather or the international economy turns against them (7).

Land reform by itself is not a solution to the problems of landlessness (Grindle, 1988). When patterns of deprivation, dependency, and social division have been sustained over generations, programs to improve health, education, and the ability to compete in a cash economy are necessary for the formerly powerless to alter their condition of strict subsistence and servitude.³ The Bolivian *campesinos* needed social and economic assistance to eliminate extreme poverty and substandard living conditions. Such programs might have included school systems, community improvements such as safe water sources, sanitation, highways, and electricity (Eckholm, 1979; Powelson and Stock, 1987). They needed, as well, complementary government taxation policies that would not undercut economic growth in newly developing areas.

Such relief was not forthcoming. Literacy and numeracy programs were not made available to the majority of the people who remained nonfluent in Spanish, the language of

power, politics, business, and banking. No agricultural research stations or development programs introduced training or new crops to the *altiplano*. The improvement of conditions for the indigenous peoples depended upon their own efforts in a largely hostile or indifferent social, economic, and political environment.

There were gains, nonetheless. *Campesinos*, working within the traditional market structure based on informal credit and trade-and-barter, expanded their urban marketing networks. In response to this trade, agricultural output rose for fifteen years after the reform (from 1953 to 1968). Peasant income rose between 52 and 67 percent (Powelson and Stock, 1987, 100). The *campesinos*, through their own initiative, effected a rise in their standard of living.

Campesino Life Today

The foregoing gives a condensed but focused look at the conditions that limited peasant opportunities before land reform and after. The *campesino* way of life is changing relatively slowly. Planting and herding remain the chief occupations of people in the *altiplano*. Dependence upon llama and sheep wool for clothing keeps isolated communities in touch with one another as people follow their grazing animals about in the mountains. In a land where a "village" may stretch for several kilometers along a shallow river bed, people think nothing of walking long distances to market their goods and visit with one another.⁴ People are free to cultivate land that no one else has claimed. Building material—adobe—is free, and people build homes and corrals virtually wherever they wish to.⁵

This great freedom to settle, to acquire additional farmland, and to build with almost no restrictions gives rural Bolivians specific opportunities to enhance their holdings. Though the soil is not equal to the rich lands that were also nearly free for the asking as little as one hundred years ago on the North American continent, *campesinos* do benefit from access to land as a productive resource.

I observed many examples of recent adaptations and innovations in Bolivian farm life.

Some of the new technologies, such as greenhousing and aquaculture, come from contact with Argentinians, Europeans, and the Japanese. Other technologies, such as those making use of irrigation channels, seem to be innovations generated by the indigenous people. Even in remote villages some four hours walk from the nearest roadway or trail that a pickup truck could negotiate, people have installed passive, solar-heated greenhouse units, fashioned crude but effective hand-dug irrigation systems beside small streams, and built hutches for raising rabbits. People have constructed schools and health clinics using adobe blocks that were shaped and sun-dried at the sites.

One European-supported community that I visited but did not record data for was a research project itself. It was a model *altiplano* village whose residents were striving to become self-sufficient in terms of producing a high quality, varied diet so that its residents could eat, maintain good health, and sell or trade their surplus food. The village had a windmill to pump irrigation water to rows of adobe greenhouses covered with bubble plastic from Argentina.

Another village, in the Cochabamba Valley nearly 40 kilometers from the city of Cochabamba, was made up of independent farmers who had taken control of the land during the reform. These *campesinos* were growing hybrid fruits and vegetables, grafting fruit with specially-purchased root stock, and raising specially bred carp in a communally-owned and built fishpond. They had learned of these new technologies through a government-sponsored horticultural institute in Tarata and through the Dorothy Baker Environmental Studies Institute in Cochabamba.

Though there have been some negative outcomes of the land reform that occurred nearly forty years ago, including initial violent confrontations between the *campesinos* and government officials (Heath, Erasmus, and Buechler, 1969) and a mutual sense of betrayal and ill-will between the former peasants and former elite,⁶ the benefits are becoming apparent. The dramatic increase in the number of rural markets, the rise in real income for the *campesinos*, and locally-motivated participation of rural people in exploring ways to

change their lives indicate a rise in opportunities tied directly to land reform and to the freedom to experiment with new means of production.

Summary

I propose to show in this study that the mothers' clubs I visited are playing a significant role in community and personal development among the *campesina* women of Bolivia. My hypothesis is that women, through their collective efforts, organize their resources to allow for rapid improvements in health, education, and the general standard of living for their families. In working for community improvement, the women gain direct, positive benefits from themselves, and are thus self-empowered. I am testing the hypothesis by looking at the organization and activities of six mothers' clubs, by assessing those clubs in terms of self-help criteria, and by analyzing the effects of the club activities on the members and on the members' families. My conclusion is that women's voluntary, collective efforts are indeed at least one factor directly responsible for a rise in the standard of living, health, and education for communities, and that those same efforts empower the women who make them.

These self-help groups are "service-oriented mutual aid groups" (Gartner and Reissman, 1977, 6) formed by people whose goal is to help one another and to help themselves overcome common drawbacks imposed by their society. The six characteristics cited by Gartner and Reissman (1977) that distinguish self-help groups from other kinds of unions and organizations are apparent in the Bolivian groups:

- #1 Personal interactions characterize members' contact with one another.
- #2 The groups begin spontaneously, at the grass roots level.
- #3 The members control the range and scope of club activities.
- #4 The members decide upon activities in a democratic way.
- #5 The club was started by women with little or no public power or influence.
- #6 The group is an important source of community activities and personal growth.

The way these clubs operate give women more control over their lives and allow them to set priorities in ways that raise their standard of living. I will show that these clubs empower their members in seven distinct categories: self-esteem, health, political activities,

housing, economic well-being, literacy and education, and appropriate technology.

Finally, I will examine the effects of empowerment upon the women themselves, noting far-reaching and long-term changes in their actions and in their thinking. These effects of empowerment are important to the body of development and feminist theories because they pinpoint one process by which societies make fundamental changes in traditional power structures, in individual expectations, and in standards of health and education.

Chapter II.

Review of the Literature

Theory and Research on Self-Help Groups

Over the last decade, development research has focused on how to change people's lives for the better. With that has come debate over what is "better." Development projects in the 1950s and 1960s were top-heavy in that they depended upon a trickle-down effect to create changes in people's lives. In the 1970s, agencies and governments alike began to realize that the people who were previously the targets of development plans had to become active agents in the planning and execution of projects that involved them. Looking at some of the development work in Third World countries, we can see that some of the most successful programs were built upon the plans of the people they serve directly.⁷

Russell Ackoff (1984) gives a working definition of development that helps put voluntary, grassroots organizations such as mothers' clubs on a solid footing for real community improvement.

Development, contrary to what many believe, is not a condition or a state defined by what people have. *It is a capacity defined by what they can do with whatever they have to improve their quality of life and that of others.* [Emphasis in text.] Therefore, development is possession of a desire for improvement and the ability to bring it about. It is more a matter of motivation and knowledge than it is of wealth. (Ackoff, 1984, 195)

There are, on the one hand, policies that governments can put into effect to facilitate improvement in the lives of their citizens, making development more than the sole product of individual efforts. The above definition nonetheless underscores the important point that *people* sustain or reject development plans, not agencies or policy-makers. And there are, on the other hand, barriers to development ranging from local taboos to national policies to international barriers that simply defy the most diligent and energetic of people. But many advances can be brought about locally by comparatively poor people when they pool their resources for projects that *they* have chosen to improve their own lives.

The members of the mothers' clubs that I studied in Bolivia have done just this; they have pooled their resources for jointly conceived and implemented projects in their own communities. As a result of their efforts, they have caused desirable changes for their families and for their communities. These clubs provide us with examples of successful grassroots development strategies in action.

Another way to look at development is as a locally-initiated, problem-solving task. The people actually affected by a problem seek and carry out solutions that best fit their needs, not the needs of others. Harman (1984) explores the theory of development as a problem-solving task. When old ways of solving problems no longer work, he says that new thinking is necessary. He rejects the following three postulates, claiming that they are not valid approaches to settle economic or political problems:

- International disputes can legitimately be settled by war.
- The high standard of consumption that developed nations enjoy is possible; mass-consumption/full-employment can be the hallmark of every society.
- Economic needs guide all decisions.

Harman proposes these new principles to take their place.

- High value should be assigned to public support of the common good.
- Honesty should be valued in all human interactions.
- Social accountability should be the underlying guide for making all decisions.

He proposes, to that end, emphasis on the following development activities:

- Nonprofit, informal, and voluntary organizations to supercede programs focused on strictly economic concerns. People's visions are too narrow and their fields of action too limited by primary emphasis on maximizing profits. Human values and commitment need to be an integral part of development thinking.
- Decentralization and formation of smaller groups composed of people in

"target" areas. This allows for better assessment of needs and feasibility of proposed solutions.

- Cooperative efforts to solve problems. By working in tandem instead of in opposition or competition, people can mobilize resources to act with greater social responsibility.

The mothers' clubs I studied in Bolivia are effectively small-scale models of Harman's proposal. Their goals and programs grew from nonprofit, community-oriented, cooperative efforts in which members concentrated on producing changes that benefitted all of the members of their communities.

Korten and Klauss (1984) devote three articles in their book to the issues of equity and self-reliance in development projects. They focus on the role of development agents in entering an unfamiliar setting, stressing the need to let people address their own needs and collaborate on plans to solve their own problems. They stress, too, the benefits of self-reliance in building programs that can sustain themselves. A sense of ownership and local control is what motivates people to see group projects through to completion. The "creation of enabling settings" (Korten, 1984, 302) unshackles people and lets them consult freely to allocate resources and to adjust the processes of change as the need arises.

Similar differences noted between community development approaches and the rural development approaches are noted by Alliband (1983). For "holistic change emphasis" as opposed to "economic growth emphasis" (2), sustainable, small-scale projects that are actually designed and carried out by the people in a community are preferred to dependency-based, large-scale projects run by outsiders. Such is the structure of mothers' clubs in Bolivia. Their activities, flexible and chosen according to ever-changing circumstances, are sanctioned by a majority vote of the members.

This thesis, a report of the study of six mothers' clubs in Bolivia, is offered in support of the growing body of evidence that shows that grassroots, voluntary, women's organizations—sometimes called "self-help" groups—are effective agents of social and

economic change. They are also models of the type of community development advocated by Ackhoff, Harman, Korten and Klauss, and Alliband.

Empowerment and Self-Esteem

There are seven areas of empowerment supported by the literature that we will review here. The first area involves a rise in self-esteem. Women the world over have identified their most pressing needs and have acted in concert to achieve them. Carrillo (1986) writes about the empowerment of women who participate in collective activities.

One of the main aims of the feminist movement is to challenge and transform existing institutions. But it is not enough for women to become incorporated at decision-making levels. True change requires the creation of alternative institutions whose goals and internal structures [they themselves decide]. (Carrillo, 1986, 40)

Carrillo's work with women's centers in Latin America has uncovered primary activities and knowledge that Peruvian women pursue: gaining access to health services and advice on family planning, legal aid, organization of women's groups, psychiatric help, support for victims of rape and domestic violence, and greater knowledge of what other communities dare to do. Women see films, discuss issues, and counsel one another. Carrillo says that they "gain strength" from group interactions and "learn that the possibilities for changing their situation ... lie in their own hands" (Carrillo, 1986, 41). They engage in collective decision-making and task-sharing by which they recognize each other's special talents and abilities. They exchange knowledge in situations of trust, acting upon the principle of equality among equals. Carrillo's work does not represent an isolated or rare instance of women working together to consciously improve their understanding of themselves and the world. Reports of effective women's associations come from diverse communities around the globe.

Yudelman's (1987) study of five women's development organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean examines grassroots movements which have led to three kinds of organizations: those for working women, those centered on voluntary service programs, and

those that have become policy-making groups. Women in all three settings mobilize and organize resources to carry out a wide range of projects in health services, agricultural production, and income-generation. They learn and use new skills, raise their incomes, and, especially in rural areas, develop their organizations as lifelines of information extending beyond their own, often isolated, settings. Women in these groups study issues that they consider important in their lives and act with greater self-confidence as they begin to "look at themselves and the world around them differently" (Yudelman, 1987, 111). Their leaders exercise power efficiently to help the groups achieve their goals and to network with other organizations to gain access to resources outside their own communities:

Also in Latin America, one-year programs for working-class women provide training that does not focus on the acquisition of any skills, but on "the development of critical and creative faculties which permit an analysis of reality and an awareness aimed at transforming existing conditions" ("Working with Women," 1986, 58). The Manuela Ramos Movement sets substantial goals for its participants. Poor women targeted by this program learn about their bodies, their health, the roles they play during their lives, the benefits of primary education, and neighborhood organizational skills. Their own assessment of the effect of rising self-esteem and control over their lives is that they have become more secure and thus better able to make major decisions that have changed their lives. They take their new sense of security back to their homes and clubs. Projects that have come out of their efforts include the establishment of kindergartens and places to eat for children and the initiation of training courses for other women in their home communities.

Empowerment and Health

Other improvements for communities arise from women's empowerment in matters of health care. Women have created institutions and networks to ensure better health care for their larger communities. Such was the case with a Brazilian—Swiss partnership ("The Network Works!" 1985) that culminated in a major health project in Sao Paulo. Expanding

from one female doctor's efforts to improve the health of city women, a 3000-user dispensary was built, staffed, and set in operation in fewer than seven years. An initial group of fifteen women provided the impetus to found this *Dispensaire*, as it was called, which provided information services to women and also conducted research by women on health problems. Initially, when twelve women offered courses to other women on preventative health care and other health-related matters, more than 200 women attended the first ten workshops and passed on to their home communities what they had learned. As consciousness-raising about health issues brought clear benefits to increasing circles of people through the women's efforts to share what they had learned, a Women's Health Center was established in Sao Paulo. It was the first women's health service in Sao Paulo run by women for women. The recognized potential for such an undertaking unfolded as women explored ways to use their resources in powerful and influential ways.

In India, the Rural Women's Social Educational Center included, as an integral part of its health training programs, role-playing sessions to help participants understand what perpetuated situations of oppression in which Indian women found themselves. Beginning with matters of health, women from the lowest caste explored the different standards applied to men and to women, looked at government policies that affected them, studied cases of sexual exploitation and oppression, and related what they discovered to their own lives. They learned to organize village women's associations or *sanghams* to do such things as apply political pressure in order to secure drinking water, to demand higher wages, and to acquire better preventive health care services ("Starting with Our Bodies," 1986). The success of these endeavors rested jointly upon the women's own knowledge of what their needs were and on how to go about meeting them. The effects of these classes in India mushroomed as women learned about malnutrition, safe drinking water, and birth control, because they also gained the collective strength they needed to effect changes.

In Costa Rica, women gathered to discuss the Women and Health Movement that started in 1977 with an international meeting in Rome, Italy. Themes that took priority

were reproduction, medicine and drugs, and community health (Jelencic, 1987). Women addressed a variety of topics such as female circumcision in the Sudan, physical and mental illnesses among women who are oppressed, and the effects of drugs on lactation. The emphasis was on ways to improve the health of women and of their families.

In other communities, women's organizations have established health programs and/or facilities. In Nicaragua, women have united to gain access to information on abortion, contraception, and sexuality; in collaboration with Swiss women, they have established a mobile "health center"—a car supplied with information and with birth control devices—that has reached many women. In Mauritius, women have produced a booklet explaining how local diseases are transmitted and how to prevent or cure them. And in Bangladesh, a self-help project has provided health-care courses as well as income-generating courses for women who are eager for those activities. Even in more developed nations women have organized health classes; the Feminist Women's Health Collective in Berlin has brought information to women from other women to raise standards of health and to explain sexuality ("Together We Are Strong," 1987).

In May of 1987, women concerned with health and hygiene for the whole of Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific gathered to write their own report and future agenda on matters of Women and Health. They affirmed that "health is an inalienable right" and that lack of hygiene is the cause of many health problems among women ("Open Letter to the Governments ...," 1987, 14).

Empowerment and Political Action

Some of the successes of women's organizations include empowerment in the political realm. In many cases, women's organizations have been responsible for the awakening of women to the actions they can initiate to alleviate situations of discrimination and oppression. Patel (1986) writes of autonomous women's groups and their growing political clout to bring about better protection for women in India. Her works on anti-rape

movements trace the extraordinarily fast rise of this issue to national attention, based on the continuous persistence of vocal women in calling the nation to account for the injustices it condones. Politically-oriented women's groups have been active in bringing feminists' concerns to the masses and in making discussion of those issues acceptable; in addition, women's groups have become acceptable forums for the airing of personal problems and concerns of women concerning their safety, their health, and their personal well-being and growth.

Indian women have also been active in building unions for working mothers. The phenomenal success of SEWA (Self Employment Women's Association) comes from modest beginnings. First, Mahatma Gandhi was responsible for organizing the TLA (Textile Labor Association) in 1917. That organization of millworkers grew and flourished to become a major political force at local, regional, and national levels. SEWA, organized for women in 1971 at the initiative of both Ela Bhatt and the president of the TLA, attracted thousands of working women in a few years around the principle of "joint action of labor and cooperatives" (Sebstad, 1984, 8). By offering developmental services to its members in an effort to help them gain political and personal skills, individuals gain more control over their individual economic situations.

In another part of India, area-wide workshops on political action are held three times a year. Women from the poorest social strata join other women to discuss politics and political parties, village council functions, government development plans, group dynamics, effective public speaking techniques, and problem-solving skills. As they grow more confident, the women are able to "seek constructive solutions for the innumerable problems they face as the triply oppressed: as poor, as women and as untouchables" ("Starting with Our Bodies," 1986, 30).

The political empowerment of women has also led to very dramatic and forceful actions in particular cases. In the late 1970s, the mothers of Argentine kidnap victims organized to protest the horrendous indiscriminate kidnapping, torturing, and murdering that took place

when the Armed Forces assumed power in 1976. These brave women, acting in favor of social justice, forced the government to finally acknowledge the terrible deeds that were done and to seek some justice for the affected families and the nation. The *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* were a powerful and vocal political force through their collective action, seeking an end to the unconscionable practices of their government (Femenia, 1987).

A much-touted example of women gaining strength to act, based on their own efforts to learn more about their rights and potential to effect change, is that of the rope makers of Ghar. From the rallying cry of "If nobody fights, we will," a bitter battle was launched over traditional rights of access to forest land. When men backed down under government threats of retaliation as villagers tried to cut the grass that provided the source of their livelihood, the women organized to fight unfair government policy. "The realization that the struggle for the right to work, and for a basic human wage, is a matter of as much concern to women, [sic] can become the turning point in any movement" (Jaitley, 1987, 17). Not only have the women regained partial access to the grasses in the forest, but they have formed women's groups in five surrounding areas to study the pricing system affecting the return on their labor. They have also established health training centers, another by-product of their close relationships.

At international conferences all around the world, women discuss the issues and successes of consciousness-raising as a most effective way of enhancing control over their lives. Carr (1984), reporting on a Latin American conference, notes that workshops that "attempt to change the minds of rural women by teaching them how to struggle for the rights of women" (26) are most valued by participants.

Women in the Middle East, other parts of Asia, and in Africa have pointed out the need for more rights for Moslem women as valued citizens of their countries. Iranian women calling for peace and democracy (Bahar, 1987) have protested the oppressiveness of the post-Shah regime, a regime that they had helped to overthrow in hopes that more rights and privileges would be granted to all citizens. The Platform of the Committee in Defense

of Women's Rights in Iran (1987) called for communication and cooperation by the Iranian government with women's organizations in Iran. In 1978, women living under Moslem laws discussed international issues at an ISIS Exchange Programme. Organizers decided that consciousness-raising and awareness-training were necessary components of women's groups bent upon helping women change the conditions under which they live ("Women Living Under ...", 1987).

Moran (1989) tells of the women of Grebo in West Africa who marched together to protest a government-imposed tax. Though they did not win their plea to have the \$10 per head tax repealed or lowered, their collective actions in many endeavors continued, and they had no fear of tackling problems that interfered with the well-being of their families. Moran cites other examples of women supporting one another to achieve collective goals: the "Women's War" in Nigeria in 1929 reported by Judith Van Allen (1972) in her famous reports about the practice of "sitting on a man"; a case in the Cameroons in which Igbo women challenged the British colonial institutions and actually physically fought men in battles that left over one hundred women dead or injured; and other cases in which tribal women protested unjust situations for which collective action seemed the best answer or last resort left to them.

Though confrontation and physical violence may not be the preferred way to solve disputes, women have resorted to force to bring about changes in conditions. Such examples are valid indicators that women can and do organize themselves to promote changes that individual women, alone and unaided, are not likely to be able to achieve.

Empowerment and Housing

In the last decade, the issue of women and housing in Third World countries has received much attention and undergone investigation. Women from Jamaica, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe have "demonstrat[ed] exceptional ability and commitment in collective, self-help projects" that result in construction of houses and emergency shelters ("Decent Shelter ...,"

1987, 12). Women not only learn basic building skills, but 90 percent of the women in one collective organization in Jamaica "found regular employment in plumbing, masonry, carpentry, electrical installation, painting and steelwork" (12). In fact, because the women were so well-trained, they were often soon promoted to "trade helpers" since they owned their own tools. They were able to earn twice the minimum wage, whereas before they had been limited to working as domestic helpers or to unemployment.

Other reports convey the sense of self-respect women earn collectively when they face and solve problems of poor housing in places as diverse as the outskirts of Panama, the slums of Sri Lanka, and the city of Toronto, Canada. In Belize, India, and Malaysia, crisis shelters have been opened to assist homeless, abused, and rejected women; in Zimbabwe, Mexico City, and Peru, centers were constructed by women to meet the needs of homeless women and their children (Building Homes ..., 1987).

Empowerment and Economic Well-Being

Dwyer and Bruce (1988) have chosen scholarly works by a number of authors showing that women of the Third World, in efforts to use the resources at their disposal in the most productive ways, allocate their resources in ways that allow them to maintain control of them. Indeed, some research shows that women may make better use of economic resources than men do.

Papanek and Schwede (1988) found that Javanese women were thriftier and better handlers of money than their male counterparts. Women tended to put family interests and the needs and desires of their children first. Even though Papanek and Schwede called formal education a "critical factor" (74) in helping women determine survival strategies for their families, and even though women with more education were more likely to take part in activities that were more leisure-oriented at times while poorer, less well-educated women valued activities that produced relief for their families, all of the women's groups' primary activities reflected concern for their families. The groups' helped family members with

cash-earning positions elsewhere, gave children encouragement and lent them assistance with schoolwork, and influenced policies in their home communities.

Three quarters of the women Papanek and Schwede studied belonged to at least one *arisan*, or informal savings group, to which they contributed a regular amount to a common pool distributed in fair rotation to each of the members during the year. When it was their turn, women were free to use the funds in any way they wished. Sometimes, to qualify for a quantity discount, the women purchased the same item for all of the members. Sometimes they financed other group transactions. A main effect was that women had a large enough sum of money at least once during the duration of the rotation to make a significant improvement in their lives.

Other primary activities of women's groups include income-generation programs that supplement other household income for family food and basic needs. Women in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Upper Volta, and Kenya have increased their household incomes through improving their production skills or means, and/or through gaining more control over the money they earn from the sale of crafts and other products (Katz and Myers, 1986; Karl, n.d.)

In India, a woman from Ahmedabad attended training sessions on how to set up a dairy farm. With the help of a SEWA member, she was able to convince a bank to loan her the money to set up a milk cooperative with other women who were also sent to the center for dairy farm training. As the women in the cooperative paired up to begin their work, they had to overcome problems of illiteracy, lack of confidence in themselves, and problems associated with learning new skills for a new kind of work. The women's experiences taught them to rely upon their collective efforts (Darshini, 1988).

In Lima, Peru, poor women whose time was divided among children, household tasks, and selling at the market place formed cooperatives where they took turns preparing meals for their families. At each *comedor popular*, as the groups were called, the women worked so many hours a week preparing meals for the families who shared in the service they

provided collectively (North, 1988). Exchanges of this sort of labor showed a high degree of mutual trust, as cooking and child care are generally thought of as household functions (Birdsall, 1980; Netting, Wilk, and Arnould, 1984). Women regularly shared child care responsibilities, exchanged information about education and job opportunities, compared prices and market trends, cooked and served joint meals, and shared information concerning appropriate technology.

In Tonga, women are buffeted by radical developmental changes; nonetheless, they are coping. Tonga is moving from a traditional society to a cash economy. It is experiencing both a shortage of raw materials and a massive shift in the way people do business for their households. Women are experimenting with ways to maximize traditional and new means of producing wealth. Small (1987) noted that the formation of women's associations has been a positive force in helping members explore new ways to combine traditional and modern forces at work in their society. She found that women's associations have provided the "backbone of rural health services" (52).

Empowerment, Literacy, and Education

Often empowerment and a rise in self-esteem come about through literacy programs. In Peru, seminars for domestic servants from ages 16 to 60 were conducted under the sponsorship of the Guidance and Human Development Center in Lima (Arce, 1982). Women took awareness courses to explore the "reality" of the world they live in. As these women from the lowest socio-economic group of employed workers gained enough confidence to shed some of the timidity that holds them back, they recognize their own potential to learn. The seminars presented material based on the women's own contributions to the classes. There were six major areas of study: literacy, formal schooling, and studying; housing conditions; health and nutrition; working conditions; ability to communicate and make needs and desires known; and matters of friendship and personally satisfying relationships with others. By the ninth of ten sessions during one ten-week period, Arce noted that "great

progress toward accomplishing one of the main objectives of the course" had been met—"to enable each person to identify her own problems and place them in perspective according to her environment" (32).

In Indonesia, where women have traditionally had more control over household resources and decision-making processes than in some other parts of the world, the first women's associations were formed in the second decade of the 1900s, just shortly after the first men's organizations were established (Zainu'ddin et al, 1979). Those first clubs, composed of elite women, chose literacy as one of their first orders of business. Their educational backgrounds were significantly better than those of the peasant women, and they were able to use their knowledge to influence all "female education," their major concern for nearly two decades.

By 1930, however, a national census revealed that only two percent of the women of Indonesia were literate. The women's clubs' members stepped up their efforts to establish schools for girls. By 1971, literacy rates had risen significantly; 70 percent of city women and 46 percent of rural women could read and write. When the figures were broken down by age groups, girls ages 10 to 14 had literacy rates of 89 percent for city and 77 percent for rural residents (Zainu'ddin et al, 1979, 74). The women's organizations were effective in helping to eliminate adult illiteracy and in increasing government attention to the need for good education among young girls.

Sometimes government agencies which sponsor women's clubs deal primarily with the education of their own members, as was the case of Ghana where most women were illiterate. A government umbrella organization, The Ghana Assembly of Women, reviewed education and other developmental issues at its larger conferences at which the work of local groups was discussed ("Ghana ...," 1975). The United States Agency for International Development's proposal for education and training of women in the 1980s gave priority to education. The proposal goes beyond basic education for children to "promoting basic life skills for adults and youth," including "functional literacy, numeracy, and an elementary

knowledge of science and the environment" (Adams, 1980, 13).

Empowerment and Appropriate Technology

Katz and Myers (1986) point out that "local self-reliance" is not something that can be taught. "It is," they say, "a quality that can either be nurtured or destroyed from outside" (23). It depends upon participation of local people in projects designed to meet their own needs. One of the most emphatic statements that they make is quoted from Evelyn James. It has to do with the use of appropriate technology in Third World settings, and it is germane to the findings in this paper that cite examples of adoption of appropriate technologies by women in Bolivia.

If women are initially involved in the design/redesign and installation states of Technology [sic] development, they can simplify operations, repairs and maintenance of the same technology to their advantage, thus facilitating economical use of local (indigenous) materials/facilities and effect improvements in working conditions of women and society. The use of AT [appropriate technology], which by its nature is relevant to the family in particular and the society in general, helps women in society to conserve and to involve themselves in all types of work and activities, which used to be regarded as men's work. [Quoted from Evelyn Nelly James from Kigoma, Tanzania] (Katz and Myers, 1986, 24)

The sense of "ownership" fostered by participation of women in all aspects of adopting appropriate technology increases the effectiveness of its use. "If AT is to serve people, enabling them to have more control over their lives, especially in meeting basic needs, it must be created, developed, used and controlled by the people themselves ..." (Katz and Myers, 1986, 25). Clear cases of failure to involve women in the use of appropriate technology to initiate and sustain potable water supplies in several African nations prompted UNICEF to conclude in 1983 that "despite their important and multiple roles, women are presently not adequately involved in the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade Activities" (*Women and Water*, 1986, 39).

Changes have taken place since the report *Women and Water* was written. Now women are involved in water projects that introduce water and sanitation technologies to local

communities. Accounts of protecting communal wells from theft and contamination in Africa, of installing better latrines in Asia, Latin America, Mexico, and Africa, of demanding and getting better conduit and drainage systems in India and in Indonesia are surfacing in women's literature ("Women in the Water Decade," 1989).

In Kenya, where women are traditionally responsible for water, women's groups have been able to improve local water supplies through the construction of rain-water collection systems. And, if women are given training in the repair of such systems, they are able to maintain them because they feel that it is their contribution to the improvement of the community ("Where Have All the Women Gone?" 1986). In the Philippines, mothers' clubs repair old wells and construct new ones, train pump caretakers, and promote the construction and use of more sanitary latrines ("Women Pumping Water," 1986).

Women's use of many types of appropriate technology in Africa is impressive. A recent article by Osuala (1987) cites several examples (see Table 6):

Table 6.
Uses of Appropriate Technology for Daily Chores in Africa

Activity	Uses of Appropriate Technology
Water Collection and Purification	rainwater catch basins under thatched roofs covered with polyethylene; charcoal water filters that women can build with clay pots, clean stones, gravel, sand, and charcoal; simple water pumps that operate in a fast-moving stream to pump water to a height of 150 meters; donkey-pulled carts for hauling water
Processing Crops	groundnut decorticators; maize shellers; rice hullers; cassava graters; sugar cane crushers
Cooking	firewood-saving mud cookers; solar cookers
Preserving and Storing Crops	solar dryers; raised storage bins for grain; rat baffles; evaporative charcoal coolers
Income-Generating Ideas	elevated rabbit hutches for better animal health; improved bee hives; simple kick wheels for turning clay pots; improved kilns; improved soap-making techniques; tie-and-dye and other techniques for making attractive cloth products

(Source: Osuala, 1987)

In an Exchange Programme sponsored by ISIS⁸ in 1987, women from fourteen countries convened in Bangalore, India, for a one-month course on appropriate technology. The course allowed participants to share their experiences and to exchange ideas about how work in appropriate technology was proceeding ("Across Cultures ...," 1987). The women noted the need for fair and democratic allocation of resources, for major roles in decision-making, for respect for the earth and its resources, for justice for the disadvantaged, for accessibility to resources, and for knowledge transfer to the people involved in using appropriate technology. Such testimonials of women's cooperation in furthering the adoption and adaptation of appropriate technologies attest to women's growing role in promoting development around the world.

Summary

Research from the 1970s and 1980s shows repeatedly that women can identify their own needs and produce solutions to their own problems. We have moved from the position of lamenting the absence of definitive literature to needing to act upon well-documented statements that women need to be the primary agents in changing and controlling their lives.

The literature also demonstrates overwhelmingly that women around the world have many of the same concerns. Their primary interests are for the health, education, and general well-being of their families. They combine their resources when they organize collectively, and they act upon shared concerns to improve their lives and the lives of the members of their communities.

A definite, two-way process emerges from this study of women's empowerment. Though women's primary concern is usually centered upon their families, their efforts to improve the lives of others produce beneficial and lasting effects upon themselves. By actively seeking through self-help organizations to free their families from the fetters of poverty, illiteracy, and ill-health, they gain self-esteem and are changed forever. Women's organizations are changing the lives of women and promoting the welfare of communities all over the world.⁹

Chapter III.

A Description of the Mothers' Clubs

Overview

From December 20, 1987 to January 24, 1988, I observed six mothers' clubs. The chief limitations of the study were time and language. I had only five weeks to visit and interview members and had to work through an interpreter to understand the Quechua and Aymara speakers. Even when dealing with Spanish-speakers, an interpreter helped clarify some issues.

I had lived in Bolivia for a year and a half in 1977 and 1978. Consequently, I knew indigenous women in three of the groups that I visited (Cochabamba, Villa Moscu, and Somos). The husband and wife team who interpreted from Quechua and Aymara into Spanish for me were friends from those earlier times. Their first language was Aymara, and their home community was Huaynuni, a tin mining community in the *altiplano*. The friendship we had established in 1976-77 when our children were pre-schoolers together made communicating about even sensitive topics much easier. Because of the very forward-looking nature of this couple, we were able to discuss matters of health, family planning, education, illiteracy, and superstition with people we interviewed and with one another. I have great confidence that the information I gathered was accurate.

I approached each club with a set of specific questions [see Appendix A]. As I recorded my observations, it became apparent that each club was different. I recorded the history of each club's formation, its dues and membership structure, its meeting times and places, the procedures followed for the election of officers, the process by which members made decisions, and the activities that members undertook as a group.

I obtained data in three main ways: through talking with individuals in clubs, through conversations and clarifications with my interpreters, and through participant observation.

In addition to those main sources of information, I was able to discuss the club visits, after they had been completed, with my interpreters and ask them for clarification on issues that surfaced after the contacts had been made. In some cases, the interpreters were able to return to members of the clubs and obtain more specific or detailed information. In the case of La Loma, I visited the club a second time to find answers to my questions.

From the data gathered on the clubs' histories, procedures, and activities, I saw that, though each one had slightly different goals and activities, commonalities were apparent. Important priorities had been established in education, health and family planning, nutrition, and economic well-being. The members lent emotional and sometimes financial support to one another as they shared ideas and voiced needs; pooled resources of time, energy, and goods; responded to one another's concerns; and planned together to achieve group goals.

I talked with club members to hear their assessments of the groups they had voluntarily joined and supported. A general pattern emerged, and I found that a two-way process was occurring: As these women engaged in activities designed to help their families, they were also helping or empowering themselves. They became agents of change, confident enough of their own abilities that they were able to make more changes than they had originally anticipated. I was able to point to specific areas of empowerment in seven categories: self-esteem, health, political activities, housing, economic well-being, literacy and education, and appropriate technology.

Background on Mothers' Clubs in General

The women's groups, called "mothers' clubs," were first conceived in the 1950s. They were created as channels for the distribution of charitable food shipments from the United States to poor families in Bolivia. The Catholic Church served as the organizing agent to oversee the fair allocation of flour, oil, sugar, and other foodstuffs.

In later years, women who had noted the benefits of these cooperative endeavors formed more groups, retaining the identifying name "mothers' clubs" to increase members'

and potential members' familiarity with the idea of working in more formally organized clubs for women. Since the appellation "mothers' clubs" was recognized, the women felt that men, who might otherwise oppose their activities, would be more sympathetic to them.

Mothers' clubs have become an established institution in Bolivia. A national federation, established in the late 1970s and based in Santa Cruz, provides additional support and guidance to local clubs that desire broader networking and interaction. This organization is funded by the local women's clubs which register and pay for membership privileges. In return, the national federation makes certain services available: officer training programs, speakers on health topics, legal advice to abused women, and regional forums for discussion of government policy issues.

The women in local clubs have achieved impressive accomplishments through the commitment of their members, and sometimes by taking advantage of the services that the larger organization offers to affiliated chapters. [Since the clubs I visited were made up mostly of indigenous women who were very poor or very far from large cities, only one (the El Torno mothers' club) belonged to and used the services of the national organization. However, all of the clubs drew upon other external and internal resources which I will describe below.]

Specific Information on the Six Mothers' Clubs in This Case Study

The groups I visited varied considerably in size, ranging from five to one hundred thirty members. Regardless of club size, the women showed a tenacious dedication to achieving the goals they laid out for themselves. Relying entirely upon volunteer efforts (i.e., without paid staff), these locally organized and controlled groups completed a range of projects, such as the establishment of literacy programs, the erection of school buildings, the building and staffing of clinics and medical dispensaries, the sponsorship of community members to health institutes, and the construction and maintenance of greenhouses and fishponds. The clubs were able to finance their projects through dues and sacrifices of

time, resources, and energy by members. A closer look at the activities of these groups highlights the tremendous commitment of the women who belong to them.

The six clubs were in six separate civil jurisdictions: Cochabamba, Villa Moscu, Somos, La Loma, Coripati, and El Torno. The first four were in the Department of Cochabamba; Coripati was in the Department of Oruro, high in the *altiplano*; and El Torno was in the Department of Santa Cruz in the jungle (see Table 7).

Table 7.
Group Names and Approximate Locations

Group Name	Department	General Location
La Loma	Cochabamba	33 kilometers from Cochabamba
Villa Moscu	Cochabamba	village adjacent to Cochabamba
Coripati	Oruro	one hour by jeep from Huaynuni
El Torno	Santa Cruz	one hour by bus from Santa Cruz
Cochabamba	Cochabamba	with the city limits
Somos	Cochabamba	near Cochabamba by city bus

I attended one or more club meetings of each of the groups, observing and sometimes participating (if asked) in the programs, explaining the nature of my study and interest in each group's activities to the interpreters for the groups. In many cases, I was able to talk at length or to travel with members of the groups. The data I gathered through these personal interviews and through observing the interactions among the women form the basis for the conclusions I have drawn about the way they are raising standards of health, education, and economic conditions.

In Table 8 below, I have given each club's date of establishment and membership statistics. In most cases club members spanned an age range from teenagers to quite elderly women.

Table 8.

Year of Establishment, Size of Group, and Age Range of Members

Group Name	When Established	Number of Members	Age Range
La Loma	about 1974	86	14-86
Villa Moscu	early 1987	5	25-45
Coripati	about 1984	30-40	15-60
El Torno	about 1972	40	25-65
Cochabamba	about 1975	100-130	18-65
Somos	before 1977	20-30	11-70

Each group had a regular meeting schedule and all but one collected weekly or monthly dues from its members (see Table 9).

Table 9.

Dues and Meeting Schedule

Group Name	Dues	Meeting Schedule
La Loma	1 <i>peso</i> */week	every Monday
Villa Moscu	none	twice weekly
Coripato	yes	monthly
El Torno	yes	monthly
Cochabamba	2 <i>pesos</i> */month	monthly
Somos	1/2 <i>peso</i> */month	weekly

*The U.S. dollar exchange rate at the time of my visit was 2.24; one *peso* was worth about 45 cents.

In Table 10 below, I have listed the main activities and major accomplishments of each group to help the reader keep salient features in mind and to help her distinguish among the groups as we examine them.

Table 10.
Activities and Major Accomplishments

Group Name	Main Activity	Major Accomplishments
La Loma	Community Projects	meeting center, health clinic, trained health promoters, doctor and nurse living in village, immunization program, health classes, water tower, fishpond, grafted fruit trees
Villa Moscu	Sewing Club	mastering patterns for making knitted dolls
Coripati	Community Projects	meeting center started, adult classes in Spanish, greenhouse, trained health promoter
El Torno	Group Projects and Business Venture	meeting center, cooperative farm and produce-marketing business, community hospital, funds collected for emergency help to members
Cochabamba	Elected Officers Decide	small handicraft projects, free food distribution, visits by a doctor for children
Somos	Group Activities	meeting center, medical post, sewing classes, soccer games

In all of the groups except the sewing group of Villa Moscu, club members elected officers yearly. The elections for president, secretary, and treasurer were what we think of as standard, secret-ballot, plurality-wins elections. Those who could read and write helped those who could not. On-the-spot translations from Spanish to Aymara or Quechua were provided as needed, or the meetings were simply conducted in Aymara or Quechua.

All of the officers whom I saw were quite proficient at their duties. The presidents had a sense of authority about them. They gathered people together and conducted efficient meetings based on a commonly accepted and regular agenda. In fact, the La Loma club, as a standard procedure, worked from a typed agenda and minutes. [The Cochabamba group

was the single exception to the purely democratic process that I have outlined above. The differences are described in detail under the data section of this paper.]

The Data

Group La Loma

The largest and oldest of the six groups I visited had established such a solid foundation for itself that I discovered an anomaly related to location of families after marriage. About 15 of 29 women that I interviewed indicated that they had been born in La Loma, that they had married men from other localities, and that their husbands had moved to La Loma to live and work instead of having their wives join them in their villages. [Problems with interpreting the answers on a few of the questionnaires make an exact figure difficult to assess.] In other parts of Bolivia, this is not the normal custom among the *campesinos*. Wives usually move to their husbands' localities where land is owned and where a couple moves into a family home or builds a new one on or near family grounds. But in La Loma, the cohesiveness of the women's clubs and the value of their established activities caused women to remain in the village and had drawn men to this community of recognized, relative prosperity.

The 86 women of the La Loma Group had accomplished such significant goals during the 13-year existence of their club that the lives of the families in the village have changed. The members have constructed a primary school building, and the Bolivian government sends an elementary teacher to La Loma each year. The women have also erected a *posta* (community center). During the rainy season, the club holds its meetings indoors, so there is no break in the weekly routine of women gathering to consult, exchange personal news, and work on joint projects. In good weather, the members and their accompanying children meet in the courtyard behind the *posta*. When school is officially out for three summer months (December, January, and February), the women have, in the past, hired a teacher to give the children extra classes in the *posta*, which they have equipped with a blackboard and

school desks.

The yard outside the *posta* is part of the domain of the mothers' club. It is bounded by a long wall on one side, a field on the far end, the *posta* and the street on a third side, and a five-room clinic and doctor's personal quarters on the fourth side. The mothers' club built the five-room adobe building to take advantage of a government program allowing them to petition for an interning doctor for a year at a time. The government bears the expense of a physician's salary if a community provides a building, thus encouraging doctors to serve in rural areas for at least their required, year-long internship. There was no cost to the members for building the clinic. They hauled mud and made the adobe blocks themselves, forming, drying and baking them, and then constructing the walls.

The club has also built a water tower that stands near the *posta*. The women had expressed a need for the tower, and they had saved money for its construction. The storage capacity is adequate enough for some of the villagers to irrigate their own garden plots. Since only a few families do this, there does not seem to have been a problem calling for the rationing of water.

The doctor serving La Loma when I visited attended all of the weekly meetings, checked the sick children and babies, administered immunizations, gave talks on health issues including birth control and family planning, and prescribed and dispensed medicine from the clinic. He maintained active program of vaccination in the village. Posters about the necessity of immunizations decorated the walls of the rooms in the clinic. The doctor kept records on each of the children he saw so that he knew who needed shots and when to give them. On one of the days that I attended a club meeting, some 50 children were in attendance. The doctor spent some time with the children who were ill and with their mothers.

One room of the clinic was set up solely for obstetrics and delivery. Another room served as an examining room. A third was the nurse's office and was also reserved for very ill patients who required overnight care. The fourth room served as a sitting/visiting room

where the doctor entertained his own guests and where we who were visiting ate our noon meal. The last room was the doctor's own where he lived during the week. [The doctor whom I met, an intern from Cochabamba, returned to his wife and young children on the weekends. His family had elected to stay in Cochabamba while he completed his service in La Loma. He was the first doctor from the government, and the women were already planning to ask for another intern when his stay ended late in 1988.]

A hired nurse, whose salary was paid from club dues and activity proceeds, attended the people of the village full time. The club had hired the nurse I met before the doctor came, because the mothers wanted medical care for their families and for themselves. The government did not offer a plan for sending nurses to rural areas, as it did for doctors.

When I arrived in December of 1987, the pickup truck we drove to the village of La Loma carried a barrel of about 30, specially bred carp to go into the newly-tarred cement pond that the women had dug by themselves, hired a mason to line with concrete, and tarred against leaks. The two-meter-deep, four-by-five meter pond had been constructed for the carp because the women wanted to raise fish as a protein supplement for their families' diets. The carp and the water plants were a gift from an experimental institute organized by Dr. William K. Baker of Cochabamba. These fish were not being raised for sale, the women emphasized, but for food. They were well aware of the need for a balanced diet for themselves and for their families. [La Loma is very near a lake, but fish in those waters are very hard to catch and fishing is a time-consuming chore.] Their efforts to create a fish pond were out-of-the-ordinary for Bolivian communities. The pond was located on their community lot, just outside the clinic building and surrounded by a chain-link fence that the club members had purchased and erected. They did not want any of the children, animals, of other people accidentally or purposefully near the water.

Another activity of this women's club included sponsoring training for club members at a national health institute. At the one of the December meetings that I attended, two young, unmarried girls ages 17 and 18, reported on a six-week-long health-training session

they had attended in Tarata, Bolivia. Their way was paid for by the mothers' club. Their "job," in exchange for the tuition, was to convey what they had learned to the rest of the women in the club. These girls were bright and cheerful, fluent in both Spanish and Quechua, able to read and write well, and enthusiastic about their training as health promoters in the community. Their bi-lingual abilities were a bonus since they took the courses in Spanish and were then able to relate the material in Quechua, the language spoken at the meetings. Many of the women in the club were not fluent in Spanish.

These two girls and I spent time together in Cochabamba, as well as in La Loma. They went to the city to market and to visit with relatives while I was there. I spoke with them at some length. These same girls had previously been sent to a horticultural training center to learn about grafting apple and peach trees, and about raising new varieties of tomatoes.

I spoke with one of the girls about her knowledge of plants and her concern for the ecosystem. She had learned how to graft trees in more than one way so that the plants grew well. She chose the grafting method to suit the trees she was working with. She had observed that insects in the fruit were not a big problem in La Loma, but that birds were. Some people poisoned the birds and they died. She said that her family did not like to do that, so they chose to just watch the birds and the trees. There was plenty of fruit for both birds and people, she said.

From the girls' input about raising higher-yielding crops, people of the village had learned to spray and/or dust their fruits and vegetables to ward off pests and diseases. According to what the girls said, they had some of the best yields for table and market of any villages in the area. The doctor said that the people and the animals of La Loma were generally healthy and well-fed. In addition, these two girls had taken a course called "The Reality of Man" at a science center in Cochabamba where they studied natural cycles and learned about nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and oxygen exchanges; weather; the seasons; generations of plants and people; rivers and water flow; and a little about astronomy.

Finally, I found that the men of La Loma had good feelings toward the mothers' club

and their accomplishments. The doctor indicated that the men appreciated the higher level of medical care, of schooling, the better and more varied diet, and the good care that the women took of their families. The man who drove the truck and took the carp to La Loma had visited often with the villagers in the past. He said that the men were pleased with their wives' endeavors. The weekly meetings were such a normal part of village life that routines had accommodated the club's schedule for several years. He said that the men spoke with pride about the club and its activities.

Group Villa Moscu

This group of five members was different from all the others that I visited, yet its impact on the lives of the women involved was undeniable. The group was organized "deliberately" in the following way. A German woman, Ursula, who lived just outside Cochabamba in the small community of Villa Moscu, had several German magazines in her home. She spoke Spanish very well and had many friends in her neighborhood. A friend and neighbor saw the stuffed, knitted animals shown in the magazines and asked Ursula if she would translate the directions into Spanish in order to teach a small group of friends to make the animals. Ursula agreed, and the women began meeting twice a week, at first, to learn the patterns. Later they could only meet once a week and still fulfill their other family obligations. The goal of the group was to learn to make the stuffed animals and dolls for their own children's enjoyment. They also obviously enjoyed getting together and chatting as they worked.

When I visited, the group had been meeting for about six months. The members had established orderly meetings and had a routine that was comfortable. One woman brought her husband along the day I joined them. Sometimes they brought other friends as well. The young children either accompanied their mothers and played quietly beside them, played outside in the garden and patio area, were cared for by siblings or friends, or attended school while their mothers met.

From the beginning, Ursula offered her home for the meetings and served simple refreshments. There seemed to be a regular discussion of recipes as the mothers wanted to know how Ursula baked bread and sweet treats. Ursula herself did not do much needlework, but she and the other women sat and worked and talked about all sorts of things: the handwork itself; families; husbands' and other men's attitudes toward women in general; money; cooking; health; family planning; and birth control. There was a real sense of enjoyment from sharing mutual interests and from creating close bonds of friendship. One group member noted that one of the most beneficial things about the meetings was the opportunity to learn about birth control from Ursula and from the others. She noted that men did not discuss birth control, and that it was not easy to get reliable information on family planning methods. As the women shared what they knew and asked Ursula to answer their questions, they learned about their own bodies and gained the potential to better promote their reproductive preferences. They considered themselves fortunate that Ursula was well-versed about such matters.

After six months of meeting steadily, the members had learned to knit the patterns and had memorized them pretty well. They made yarn hair, sewed on buttons for eyes, and made clothing for the dolls. Of course, most of the Indian women of Bolivia learn to spin and work with yarn from childhood. The skills required to complete the patterns in the magazines were something that this group already knew.

They were beginning to think about marketing their products, but the time it had taken to make and stuff a nice doll or animal seemed to give them pause. They were very busy with their own families. They enjoyed their meetings, but they did not have much more time to sew. Creating enough dolls for market would have been quite a chore, and I doubt that any one of the five women had time to devote to this bigger project. Each had from one to five children. Some of the women were married and some were not. They were all very busy.

There were no dues collected in this group. Each woman provided her own sewing

equipment and supplies, and each worked on the pattern(s) that struck her fancy. At the meeting I attended, one woman was knitting leg warmers for an American friend and being paid for the service.

The group also discussed the *junta vecinal*, the neighborhood board, on the day I visited. This body had the authority to ask individuals and families in its locale to supply heavy labor for town projects such as maintaining roads. Household units were asked to contribute an average of one eight-hour day's worth of labor per month. If there was no man in the family to labor, then a woman or some combination of a woman and her children had to work. The women in the group recognized that as a necessary but definite bother. They acknowledged that some of the labor required was very difficult and more appropriately performed by men than by women.

Group Coripati

This group had a most interesting and, as I understood it, unusual history. Coripati was a very new town, about ten years old when I visited. About 30 families had moved to this spot on the *altiplano* about one hour's distance by jeep from the tin-mining town of Huaynuni. They had built their houses and begun farming. After the men had lost jobs in the mines, which were not scheduled to reopen at any specific time in the future. Most people who had been miners stayed in Huaynuni or moved to other established villages, but these pioneer families had decided to establish their own agricultural community. Since its founding, more people had moved to Coripati, and the village had grown along a stretch of the small river from which the people get their water. There was a main square with ten to twelve houses around three sides. The people gathered there for meetings. The rest of the families had settled along the river bank and in the surrounding fields, some several hours' walking distance from the main center.

The mothers' club consisted of about 30 women. They had had to fight for the right and the time to meet, when they established their club in 1984. The men had not approved

of their gatherings and, for the first year, made it difficult for the women to get together once a month. Because some women had to walk for four hours to get to the town square, each meeting took a whole day from the women's lives. However, once the men began to see the benefits, they became more cooperative. In fact, they felt free to come and meet with the women, as some did while I was there. They liked the club and seemed very proud that it existed.

These women, with the help of the men, had started to build a meeting room. They lacked the money to buy tin for a roof and to buy a door, but the walls were up and the doorway was built to accept a door when one could be purchased. They had hoped that I would help with finances, but my two Bolivian interpreters and guides, one of whom had cousins in this village, quickly and firmly explained that I was only visiting to see how the club functioned, and that I was not a rich American with extra dollars in my pocket.

The women in Coripati had had contact with the Dorothy Baker Institute for Environmental Studies in Cochabamba, and they learned how to construct a greenhouse from that center. They had built a greenhouse with a bed one meter below the surface of the surrounding ground. In it were tomatoes, cucumbers, and several other green vegetables. Some of the teenage boys of the village had lent their muscle to the digging and construction of the walls and top. The roof was a relatively thick but ordinary sheet of plastic of the kind I had seen on greenhouses in other villages.

A one-room primary school building had been constructed in the middle of a row of houses on one side of the village square. The club had its meetings in the school room. On another side of the square was a house in which an older man who had attended a health promotion clinic lived. He kept German-manufactured medicine and dispensed eye ointments and what few medicines were available for common ailments. The medicine was provided by this man free of charge to those who needed it. I do not know where the ointments came from, but did hear of a hospital in La Paz financed by the German government. It was run by a female German doctor known for her generous care and

concern for the poorer people in all parts of the *altiplano*. That hospital was a likely source of his supplies.

The Coripati mothers' club had arranged for a traveling male Spanish teacher to come and teach the adults to speak, read, and write in Spanish. He came through the area once a month, so the club meetings were held on the same days that the traveling teacher arrived. This young man was a relative of some of the people in Coripati. They liked him, and all got along well. They kept their workbooks in the school building, and all the adults who wished to, women or men, gathered for one hour to work on their lessons. They helped each other, listened to the teacher who worked informally with them, and practiced speaking Spanish. The villagers were fluent in Aymara. Some had a very limited command of Spanish.

This group, both collectively and individually, was the poorest in economic terms of any of the groups that I visited. Yet one woman had acquired a large loom in her home and showed us what she was weaving. Her demonstration was eagerly attended by the people gathered from the village, too, so I assume that the loom was a new acquisition. The villagers examined it and asked questions about the way it worked and how the cloth was created. Indian people in the *altiplano* make most of their own clothing from sheep and llama wool. However, the weaving is done on small hand-and-foot looms. This one large loom stood about two meters high and more than a meter wide. In no other village did I see a loom of these dimensions.

Most of the people who had settled in Coripati farmed the plots of land they had claimed. A few men and women spent the week in Huaynuni doing whatever work they could find. At least one woman, the president of the mothers' club for that year, had a small shop in town where she stayed much of the time. She sold some items of food that were in high demand, such as bread, coca-cola, grains for soups, and a few canned and packaged goods. She was putting her children through school at the secondary level. It was not clear whether she had only the five children whom I met, or whether she had more.

There were also children of relatives who were in her home the day I visited. She may have been helping them as well with school expenses. Her teenage son was interested in radio announcing and had plans to become a disc jockey. His mother encouraged him to attend training sessions and to work toward his goal.

Group El Torno

This group, the one with the most financial resources and reserves, had the wealthiest women of any groups I visited. It was also different from the others because it was in the jungle. The town of El Torno is about an hour by bus out of Santa Cruz. The temperature is nearly always hot, and people do not spend time taking care of warm, wool clothing as they do in most places in Bolivia. Their homes reflect more wealth through the number of possessions such as cooking utensils, pieces of furniture, changes of clothing, and other household items.

The mothers' club of El Torno was established about 15 years before I visited. A number of women had gotten together to form a club so that they would be eligible to receive free food supplements from the United States, distributed through the Catholic Church. Once formed, the women decided to do more than just meet to pick up their allotments of food. They bought some land just outside El Torno to start a cooperative vegetable gardening venture. They incorporated to create a legally registered business enterprise. They all worked the land and tended the crops.

When I visited, the land had been producing sufficient quantities of produce for the women to use for their families and to sell, as a group, to the market (through an intermediary group) in Santa Cruz. If a woman in the corporation died, her daughter was allowed to take over her interest in the cooperative. However, if a second daughter or anyone else wished to become a member, she had to buy in at the value of a share at that time, as determined by the group. The club had a predetermined formula for figuring the specific value, and the club members have decided that it's fair. The amount when I

visited was estimated at over \$400.00 (U. S. equivalent). In addition, one member hinted that a woman wishing to join had to be approved by the membership first, even if she had the money to buy in. The women exhibited a great deal of confidence in their ownership of this business, and being a member of the cooperative was considered quite important.

It is important to note that there were women in the club who were not share holders in the cooperative. Though they participated in paying dues and taking part in all other club activities, the farmland venture was decidedly separate. One cooperative member expressed her opinion: Any group of people was free to do what the original group had done; any group could buy land and farm it. In fact, there was no pressure for others not to do that, but the original cooperative group did not often let others buy into their business. They were happy with the number of members and wished to maintain the amount of profit each one received.

The El Torno group seemed to have taken advantage of the legal advice offered by traveling speakers through the national federation of mothers' clubs. The local club paid a small fee to cover transportation, food, and lodging costs only. Women doctors, nurses, health promoters, and lawyers were "on call" to give advice on family planning and birth control, health matters, nutrition, protection from physical abuse, and a variety of other legal matters. There were many instances of abuse of women in Bolivia, and women were beginning to object publically to such treatment. The fact that a national organization could send speakers to talk openly about the problem and could send women to help women who were seeking possible solutions spoke of progress and determination to change the *status quo*.

El Torno had a large *Centro de Salud* or health center, which the mothers' club had helped establish. It consisted of a large, modern building. The rooms were airy and spacious with a grassy courtyard on one side where people walked. There were two wards for patients, including rooms for maternity patients and their infants, and three examining rooms for the doctor and nurses. The center was equipped with a sterilizing machine and

other modern equipment and had an adequate staff to clean and maintain it.

This was one of the nicest clinics that I saw in Bolivia, comparable to the facilities that existed in the major cities of Santa Cruz, La Paz, and Cochabamba. It was probably not set up for more than minor surgery, but it seemed to be competently run and to draw patients by public transportation from a wide area. The staff had earned the confidence of the people in the area it served, and the women in the mothers' club seemed to take its being there for granted.

The *sede* (the center or meeting house for the mothers' club) was just behind the health center. It was a small, one-room, airy building just large enough for about 35 people to crowd into and sit on benches around the walls. When the weather was not too hot or rainy, the women preferred to meet outdoors beside the building.

El Torno itself has had piped water since about 1973. Each household paid about five pesos a month for the service and the water. Before 1973, people walked one-half mile or more to the river for water. The village had been electrified three or four years before my visit. The mothers' club building had both electricity and an outside sink with running water.

Membership in this mothers' club was open to girls age 12 and up. The women felt that such girls were mature enough physically to become mothers, and so they had a right to membership in the club. I did not see any girls that young with babies, however, and did not get the feeling that they were encouraged to have children at such a young age. The general atmosphere of the group seemed to be one of wanting to include the youth to give them a sense of belonging and to train them to be a part of the group. These women were very comfortable with one another and with themselves, and they did not feel hampered or threatened by the presence of the three of us who visited and participated in their meeting. They answered our questions about the club in a friendly way, and our questions about their farming cooperative in an open but businesslike manner.

Group Cochabamba

This group was originally formed in the city of Cochabamba as a distribution point and network for *caritas* (charity) from the United States. The conditions under which the U.S. government sent food for re-distribution included provision for a dispersing agency. Since the Catholic Church had such widespread influence in Bolivia, touching the lives of nearly every person, it seemed logical to ask the Church to set up groups to handle *caritas*. However, the organization of each group was left up to its individual members, and the many groups that formed did not do so under identical or even controlled conditions. In most cases, from what I could discern, the clubs were orderly and the food was distributed fairly. But there was room for problems to arise, as they did in the case of the Cochabamba mothers' club which was organized in 1975 and described below.

There were so many women in this group (between 100 and 120) that it was divided into four subgroups. Each subgroup met during a different week of the month, and the activities designed by the club officers were repeated for each subgroup. The women were painting (decorating) table cloths with acrylic paints at the meeting I attended. They had been required to purchase the materials from the club itself for this activity, even if they wished to decline or to take their own cloth. The activity was one the officers had chosen, and the women I spoke with described this as a typical activity in recent times. The skills taught were not useful or practical for the women gathered, and the officers made a profit on the materials they sold.

The women were not happy with the activity, but if they did not participate, their monthly rations of oil, powdered milk, flour, and cracked wheat were withheld. Members were required to pay monthly dues of two pesos, whether they participated in meetings or not. If they missed paying dues, they had to make up back dues before they could claim a share of the food distribution. I listened to some women carefully figure what they thought they would have had to pay at the market to buy the same staples, and they had determined before the meeting that they were actually not getting anything at reduced prices through

the club. These women were ready to quit. The one thing that seemed to keep them in the club was their reluctance to end the monthly social time with their friends.

Group Cochabamba, organized under the auspices of the Catholic Church, was having some serious difficulties arising from dissatisfaction among the membership. The officers had been elected to their positions and refused to give them up "a few years ago," I was told. As a result, a corrupt president, treasurer, and secretary had taken control and were pilfering both free food supplies meant for the membership in general, and dues and other income from the treasury.

It was not as easy to get complete information from the members of this group since some people were upset and others were afraid to speak up. However, my main contacts, fortunately, were from the Villa Moscu knitting group. I had known one of these women when I had lived in Cochabamba in 1976 and 1977. Others in the Villa Moscu group felt quite at home with me because of that, and I was able to learn from these women, who officially belonged to or had recently belonged to the Cochabamba group, that the officers of the club were not liked by the rank and file, and that the solidarity and support that had once existed in this club were eroding. There were many complaints about the officers and their faithful followers, and at least one woman I talked to had quit the club about four years earlier. Two others who had tried to help change things were discouraged. They felt that the dues were too high, the rations too small, and the benefits of belonging to the group questionable. One had actually been elected treasurer, but she found herself under constant pressure not to question what the others were doing when she tried to understand things. When it became clear to the other officers that she would not participate in their schemes or alter the books to eliminate traces of dishonesty on their part, she was ousted from her position. She said they denied her access to the books that she was elected to keep.

I wish to note that this group had been a valuable community institution in the past. The women who had been members for some time said that the club used to distribute more

food and that it was nearly free. The dues had been very low, and the club actually undertook some money-making projects to create a collective fund. In that way, the club was able to bring in doctors and nurses to administer medical care and to give talks on family planning, birth control, childhood illnesses and immunizations, and nutrition and food preparation. At one point, there was even a woman doctor who came to talk with the women, though club members said that their favorite had been a male doctor. They would prefer a woman, they said, but that particular one was simply not the best speaker and they did not have as much confidence in her skills as they did in those of the male doctor.

The women missed those talks, which had been discontinued. The current officers had told the women that doctors charged too much to come and that they could not afford to pay so much. The officers had not pursued other possibilities. Currently, the club makes the services of a doctor available once a month at most, and he is able to see very few people, and then only those who are ill. The immunization program was defunct.

Group Somos

The village of Somos was a poor suburb of Cochabamba. The women of this group, all indigenous, were very poor. Most of them farmed on the slopes of the mountain on which they lived above the city of Cochabamba. A small school in the village served the children's primary education needs. The woman I had the most contact with, whose father-in-law I had met in 1976, was younger than 30, I believe, and had five small children. Her husband was a day-laborer in Cochabamba.

Group Somos had officially met for ten or eleven years, and the older members said that the club had been established before that time. There was a wide range in ages among the membership, from young girls whom I judged to be pre-teens to women who looked and moved as if they were in their 70s or 80s. However, I was judging by mid-west United States' standards, and, depending upon the hardships which they had endured, these women could have been in their late 40s or 50s.

Although the official age for joining the club was fourteen, there were younger girls present who took part in the activities. Eighteen women and six children attended the day I visited. They gathered once a week after *siesta* time, at about 2:30 or 3:00 in the afternoon, to talk, eat together, hold their business meeting, and then play soccer.

The *quotas* (dues) were low, probably one-half *peso* a month, but I was not given an exact figure. It is possible that the women's reluctance to tell me much about their financial situation resulted from some embarrassment about their poverty. Though they were better off in most or in all ways materially than the women of Coripati, for instance, they lived above the city of Cochabamba and were reminded daily of what they did not have in comparison to the people they saw at the markets in town. A girl of eleven years collected the *quotas* and kept a record for each member in a book. If a member was ill and did not have money for treatment, the club helped her out by drawing on that money for medicine.

The women were actively spinning wool and knitting as they sat and listened to business of the club. At the meeting I visited, the members were making arrangements to learn to knit more sweater patterns from a visitor so they could sell sweaters at the market.

These women had built a *posta medica* (medical center) several years ago. They currently had a doctor come in every morning, Monday through Saturday, to see the whole community. The government paid for that service since the building was provided and made available for the doctor's use. The club's center was attached to a church, sharing a common wall. This was a common building practice in Bolivia. Adobe buildings were often butted up against one another, especially in the case of structures used by the whole community. The *posta* consisted of only one room, but it provided a place for the administration of medical care. It was also very close to the school, making it convenient for the children to see the doctor on weekday mornings.

This club had a very friendly if somewhat shy feeling about it. The members were a bit wary of me as a stranger and as an American who spoke only some Spanish while they spoke mostly Quechua. My Spanish had to be translated to Quechua before they understood

what I said. Of all the groups I visited, this one, near the large city of Cochabamba, had more non-Spanish speakers than any other, including the Coripati group high in the *altiplano*.

Summary

The data that I collected on these six mothers' clubs showed remarkable consistency in several areas. The manner in which the women organized themselves and ran their meetings, the concentration on major activities to improve the lives of their families, and the concern for sharing responsibility and taking part in joint efforts were common across the groups. With the exception of the Cochabamba group in recent years, these women had made significant, long-term commitments to collective activities that they chose. In turn, by participating in such ventures, the women had caused significant and irreversible changes in themselves, becoming more effective agents of change than they were before their lives were touched by the mothers' clubs to which they belong.

I will show in the next chapter of this thesis that these six groups manifested the characteristics of self-help groups and that they were vehicles by which women empowered themselves. I will also show that, through the clubs, women were able to raise the standard of living for their communities, their families, and themselves.

Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

In this chapter, I evaluate the mothers' clubs to show that they are self-help groups. I also demonstrate the capacity of these clubs to empower the women who belong to them by making them active agents in raising the standard of living in their own communities. Finally, I identify the effects of empowerment upon the lives of the women and upon their communities. This thesis documents these three steps and results:

- Step 1: Evaluate to see if self-help criteria were met.
- Step 2: Evaluate to see if empowerment was occurring.
- Step 3: Identify effects of empowerment.

Step 1—Were Self-Help Criteria Met?

In order to determine if the clubs were true self-help groups, I gathered specific data from each one to match against Gartner and Reissman's (1977) list of characteristics for self-help groups. Table 11 below shows those results.

Table 11.

Characteristics of Self-Help Groups Evident in Bolivian Mothers' Clubs

Group Name	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
La Loma	x	x	x	x	x	x
Villa Moscu	x	x	x	x	x	x
Coripati	x	x	x	x	x	x
El Torno	x		x	x	x	x
Cochabamba	x				x	x
Somos	x		x	x	x	x

#1 Personal interactions characterize members' contact with one another.

#2 The groups begin spontaneously, at the grass roots level.

#3 The members control the range and scope of club activities.

#4 The members decide upon activities in a democratic way.

#5 The club was started by women with little or no public power or influence.

#6 The group is an important source of community activities and personal growth.

[Six characteristics from Gartner and Reissman (1977)]

Table 11 shows that the the clubs fulfil the self-help criteria in nearly every instance.

1. In all six clubs, members interacted directly with one another. They did not communicate by mail, by telephone, or through hired, appointed, or elected agents. Members discussed issues and made decisions face-to-face.
2. Three of the clubs started spontaneously and three did not. Clearly the women of Villa Moscu showed initiative in forming their sewing club. The women of La Loma organized in 1974 specifically to build a primary school. The Coripati club was started and maintained in spite of early resistance from the men of the village. The other three clubs, Cochabamba, Somos, and El Torno, were organized under the auspices of outside agencies working to establish distribution points for free food. However, those latter three groups had become very independent and chose their own club activities.
3. Each of the groups decided upon its own activities.
4. All of the clubs except Group Cochabamba operated through a system of majority rule. All had established a process of democratic election. Group Cochabamba once had such

freedom of self-determination, and it seemed likely that it would either disband through general dissatisfaction of the membership or that it would somehow regain that former democratic distinction.

5. The founders of the clubs and those who were elected to oversee the first activities were not people of power or public influence. Nowhere is this clearer than in Coripati, where the club meetings were initially opposed by the men.
6. Women from each of the clubs planned meeting times into their regular schedules. They could point to things that they had learned from the club that they did not or could not have learned elsewhere.

Each club, with the exception of the Cochabamba group in recent years, has provided a basis for women who are members to create their own opportunities for education and advancement. The individuals in the groups lent emotional and sometimes financial support to one another as they shared ideas, pooled resources, responded to one another's concerns, and achieved mutually-determined goals.

Though Group Cochabamba, at the time of my visit, was having difficulties with inappropriate conduct on the part of its officers, positive results in that club have been evident in the past. Even though Group Villa Moscu, the informal knitting group, may disband quite naturally once the women have completed their projects and fulfilled their stated primary purpose for meeting, that group has been a source of growth and satisfaction for its members. The other four groups (La Loma, Coripati, El Torno, and Somos) were made up mostly of independent farm women. But urban or rural, the development opportunities were clearly present.

It is also true for each group that the women originally organized to improve their lives or the lives of their families in one of these four areas: health and medical care, nutrition, education and literacy, or economic opportunities. These activities, undertaken for the sake of other people, have nonetheless enriched the lives of the women as individuals. They

have empowered themselves in identifiable ways, even as they have improved life for their families and communities.

Step 2—Was Empowerment Occurring?

Once the determined groups met the criteria of self-help groups, I studied the effects of empowerment upon the women who comprised the clubs' membership. I had to determine first of all what empowerment was, and then judge whether the members of the mothers' clubs had become empowered through their association with their clubs and through carrying out the activities of the clubs.

Elaine Pinderhughes (1983) defined empowerment as "the capacity to influence the forces which affect one's life space for one's own benefit" (332).¹⁰ Elizabeth Torre (1990) confirms, through her research and reading, that women need to have opportunities to implement their ideas in order to be self-empowered. It is not enough, she states, for women to know *what* to do; they must be able to act and remove social and/or economic constraints in order to gain a sense of empowerment. Women have to feel that they actually have some control in causing the changes that they see as desirable in order to feel empowered.

We have seen that club members addressed issues that have led directly to improvements in their lives and the lives of their families. In judging that empowerment has taken place, I have listed, in Table 12 below, the areas of empowerment definitely enhanced by club membership.

Table 12.

Areas of Empowerment Evident in the Mothers' Clubs of Bolivia

Group Name	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
La Loma	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Villa Moscu	x	x			x	x	x
Coripati	x	x	x		x	x	x
El Torno	x	x	x	x	x		
Cochabamba	x	x			x		
Somos	x	x			x		

#1 Self-esteem

#2 Health

#3 Political action (changing policy, influencing community actions/patterns)

#4 Housing (including access to near, safe water and to electricity)

#5 Economic well-being

#6 Literacy and education

#7 Appropriate Technology (direct application apparent)

We can delineate specific benefits to the members of the mothers' clubs in seven areas of empowerment.

1. Self-esteem

Building social networks and self-esteem through club activities. Club members

in all the groups obviously enjoyed getting together. Even in Group Cochabamba, the women looked forward to the meetings and felt that they were an important part of their lives. The meetings provided a forum in which women could voice their concerns and share family and community news.

In every group, members planned their household activities around meeting times. In La Loma, the women met for more than half a day each Monday, taking care of business (reporting on activities, planning future activities, meeting with and hearing from the doctor), learning new skills (exchanging knitting patterns, listening to talks by people who were invited to the community or to community members who had information to

share), and strengthening friendships (cooking and eating together, talking about personal news, seeing each others' children). In Somos, women looked forward to their frequent soccer games, as well as to sharing community news, health information, and visits from guests who brought knitting and cooking information with them. In El Torno, the women discussed business and also offered help to younger women who wished to start their own farming ventures. In Villa Moscu, the women learned to knit patterns and follow the recipes of their German hostess as they got better acquainted. They also discussed matters of health and family planning that had a direct impact upon their lives. In Group Coripati, the importance of the gatherings caused members to persevere in the face of opposition from the men; they eventually won the men's acceptance and approval of club activities.

The value of these strong social networks lay partly in the fact that the women gained confidence in themselves, and partly in the fact that they were able to significantly improve the lives of their family members. They pursued immunizations schedules for their children in Cochabamba, Somos, La Loma, and El Torno, and discussed family planning with their peers in every group except Coripati. They used their connections to doctors, nurses, and other health officials to increase their knowledge of family planning, child care, and nutrition. And in La Loma and Coripati, they sent community members out to learn more and report back to them in such matters as fruit tree grafting, aquaculture, greenhouse care, and health.

As a result of these strong networks, women grew in their ability to direct their own lives. The two teenagers of La Loma, sent to both science and health institutes by their community, were very mature and at ease in their village and in the big city of Cochabamba. They both planned to attend schools in the city to continue their education. The women of El Torno had become proficient in managing their own

financial affairs and in making marketing decisions. The club members of Coripati and Somos were among the poorest women in Bolivian society, yet they had sufficient self-esteem to arrange for, respectively, adult literacy classes and health education classes on their own. The women of Villa Moscu were comfortable altering the patterns for stuffed animals that they were learning so they could make the finished products attractive to their own children. In each club there were women who had become more confident of their own abilities to speak to others, to teach others, and to learn for themselves.

Personal satisfaction from the success of cooperative community projects. The clubs gave women an official forum for discussing and carrying out community projects. Members took the responsibility for deciding what was important to them and to their families, and they met those needs through joint endeavors. The women were able to evaluate suggestions for future projects and to choose more and more wisely what they wished to accomplish next.

The teenagers from La Loma expressed pride in the fact that they had been selected by their peers and elders to travel to institutes to learn information to share with everyone. The women of Coripati, with gentle goodwill, recognized the irony and humor in the situation of having their husbands at first oppose their meetings because they feared they would not get their meals on time, and later promoting the meetings when they realized that they would partake of the fresh vegetables from the greenhouse in their winter suppers. The women of Coripati took pride in the fact that the men even wanted to meet with them and help with community projects.

Increased confidence in matters relating to health, family planning, and birth control.

Women spoke openly about the importance of knowing about their bodies and their options to use birth control methods to limit the number of children they bore. The

women I spoke with, especially in Villa Moscu, mentioned that they had not been able to talk about birth control or family planning openly until they had gained support and knowledge from their mothers' clubs.

2. Health

Increased access to medical treatment and knowledge of better health practices. Mothers' clubs' efforts have improved community health through providing medical attention, immunization programs, knowledge of family planning, access to birth control methods, and shared information from attendees sent to health training institutes. Such deliberate actions to create or improve access to health care clearly identified the concerns of these women and mothers. The high priority of health care was obvious to the extent that, in some clubs, members had borrowed or were given money for medicine if they could not afford proper treatment.

Improved nutrition through the adoption of appropriate technologies in greenhousing, grafting and aquaculture. Information from health lectures also improved women's knowledge of nutrition.

3. Political action

Building networks with one another to change the way they lived. Women had gained the privilege of attending club meetings as an accepted part of their weekly or monthly routines. They changed long-established patterns of child and adult education in their communities, and they upgraded long-neglected health care practices. There was tremendous cooperation and mutual support among these women in order for them to make their meetings and activities regular; they made great sacrifices and worked hard to be able to meet as often as they did. In a country where refrigeration and motorized transportation were luxuries for most of these women, and where such chores as

shopping or raising food, processing food for cooking, cooking, laundering clothing, and tending fields and livestock took nearly all of an adult woman's time every day, the fact that these women had managed to take half a day to a full day for their meetings was an incredible testimonial to their perseverance. Perhaps most significant of all was the finding that the husbands of women from La Loma moved to their wives village upon marriage, a clear departure from established gender roles in Bolivia.

Four of the clubs, Somos, La Loma, Coripati, and El Torno, had systems whereby members could borrow or have money for medicine or emergency health care. This collective concern aimed at alleviating financial hardship in times of illness was evidence that the women had taken steps to protect one another from the debilitating effects of poverty and illness. They were well aware of the well-being of each family.

Promotion of consultation and social skills. All of the clubs followed "standard" procedures of one sort or another that allowed individual members the opportunity to be heard at meetings. Women had learned to voice their opinions and objections in a semi-public forum. The ability to speak forthrightly enhanced women's ability to choose and control priorities in their own lives.

4. Housing

Improvements in living conditions. Club activities were directly responsible for the improved water supply and storage in La Loma. The club sponsored the construction of a water tower, thereby eliminating daily trips to the nearby lake for water. In El Torno, the electrification of the village and the installation of water pipes from the river were achieved partly through the club's insistence that those matters be given priority.

5. Economic well-being

Opportunities to gain new, marketable skills and opportunities to participate in business ventures and transactions. From improvement of basic sewing skills to benefit their families to actually bringing in teachers and craftswomen from other communities, all six groups have provided their members with new skills or with means of generating extra income.

In the case of the El Torno group, the women had built a profitable farming business to provide them with dependable, individual incomes. The Coripati group hoped to market produce from its greenhouse. The La Loma mothers had increased their fruit and vegetable production for local markets. The La Loma, Villa Moscu, and Somos groups all provided opportunities for women to learn saleable needle work skills. Some activities in the Cochabamba club had marketing potential.

Promotion of business and organizational skills. The women in these clubs gained more than simple facts about the way the world works. Their increased knowledge included learning group organizational skills and managing group resources to accomplish tasks that were economically useful to them. Saving money as a group and paying regular dues contributed to the cultivation of good financial habits.

6. Literacy and education

Increased opportunities for primary education for children. In communities where primary education was not offered, women's clubs had built and furnished school rooms, hired teachers, and thus emphasized the value of education.

Increased opportunities for adult education. Mothers' clubs were active supporters of both formal and informal education for club members.⁴ In Coripati the members

arranged to have regularly scheduled adult literacy classes. In La Loma, two young women had been sent to attend classes given by outside agencies; they shared their knowledge with other club members.

7. Appropriate Technology

Successful experiments in greenhousing, grafting, and aquaculture were clearly evident in La Loma and Coripati. Both of these communities had had contact with the Dorothy Baker Environmental Studies Center in Cochabamba; they had benefitted from members' attendance in classes or through visiting the experimental station and learning appropriate technologies demonstrated on the grounds.

Summary

Clearly, the women of the mothers' clubs were empowered by their joint activities. They were, as Pinderhughes (1983) says, "influencing the forces which affect [their] life space for [their] own benefit" (332). In the next chapter, I will describe the effects of empowerment on the women in the mothers' clubs of Bolivia. I will also propose reasonable implications for other women who wish to raise the standard of living for their families, especially in less developed nations.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Implications

The evidence suggests that women formed clubs by themselves, functioned in self-help groups which focused on health, education, and children, and thus empowered themselves. It is significant that the resources for empowerment were not provided by outside agents of a political, economic, educational, or health-related nature. These women achieved empowerment through their own initiative and actions; and they created their own opportunities in the areas that meant the most to them. As their initial goals were met, they were encouraged to strive for more. Thus an on-going process of success promoting more efforts was established. We can see some of the results in the list of activities and major accomplishments (see Table 10 for review).

Step 3—The Effects of Empowerment

Once the self-help and empowerment criteria were met, I studied the *effects* of empowerment upon the women in the groups. Several of the effects transcend the specific accomplishments of the mothers' clubs as members broke new ground in their communities. Below is a list of effects that self-empowerment created in the setting of the mothers' clubs.

1. These women *created their own power structure* in settings where one did not exist before. They established meeting times, election and record-keeping procedures (for both financial and administrative matters), and community precedence for the recognition of their club meetings and their business. These power structures remained intact and changed the way others in the communities saw the women.

This was the case particularly in La Loma, where men from other villages married La Loma natives and moved to their wives' locality. In Coripati, the men were gradually won over to supportive roles as the mothers' clubs brought adult education classes to the village and made everyone's life better. In El Torno, the women's agricultural cooperative enterprise generated a steady income for its members so that they gained more economic freedom. In the other communities, the mothers' clubs' meetings became an accepted institution and the women were free to join and attend meetings.

2. The women gained enough confidence that they *persisted in spite of resistance* from the men. In Coripati, the women endured pressure to stop meeting and instead pursued their activities until the men saw the benefits of those activities and became active supporters of their wives.
3. The women *created an open and public forum in which they could learn about and gain support for the practice of birth control methods*. They initiated the call for doctors and health workers to teach them the whys and hows of birth control. In addition, the women acquired access to birth control devices. They used those methods, in some cases, under the care of qualified doctors and nurses in their communities whose attendance they had arranged.

The result in La Loma was a *decrease in the number of children planned* by women in their reproductive years. The women over 50 years old whom I spoke to generally had 8 to 11 children, not all of whom had survived childhood. The women who were in their middle child-bearing years, 30 to 40 years of age, had 4 to 6 children each. The teenagers and women in their 20s, for the most part, planned to have 2 to 4 children. Though a follow-up study would have to be done to determine the effects of increased access to family planning information and birth control methods, these younger women

seemed fairly confident that they had the means and the right to exert control over their own reproductive decisions.

Such widespread dissemination of family planning information is currently desired in many development programs, both in developed and in developing nations. The success that the women of these mothers' clubs have achieved on their own speaks well for the effectiveness of self-empowerment and its far-reaching consequences.

4. The women's desire to help others, to be nurturers and fulfill their traditional role as guardians of their families' well-being, was reinforced by their activities. They *became the guiding forces of the community in those areas that meant the most to them*, as they saw the health, nutrition, education, and general livelihood of others improve through their efforts. The women were empowered by this self-reinforcing cycle, in which their ability to help others led to further empowerment, which in turn led to more efforts to better the conditions of others. This seemed to be a very healthy cycle, in which the women and their families benefitted.

With the exception of the Group Cochabamba leaders, who were, in the eyes of the membership, taking advantage of the positions to which they had been entrusted, the leaders and the members of every group worked for everyone's advantage. They did not assist some people at the expense of others, nor did they exclude people from the benefits derived from their joint activities. In El Torno, even though membership in the cooperative farming effort was not generally open to new members, the women freely shared the knowledge and experience they had gained and were willing to help any other women start their own cooperative if they so desired. There was no sense of exclusiveness or unkindness to one another expressed by the members of the clubs that I visited.

5. The children of the mothers' clubs members had an *improved rate of immunization* than the previous generation of children had had. The doctor in La Loma said that there was 100% immunization there, a record that will surely continue to have beneficial effects on the children as they grow up. In other villages, access to medical attention and to immunizations was apparent from the comments of the mothers and from evidences of vaccination posters on clubhouse walls. In El Torno, Somos, and Cochabamba, doctors and/or nurses continued to give immunizations. In Coripati, the women were aware of the need for vaccinations against childhood diseases, but access to such preventative care was limited. In Villa Moscu, the women were aware of the need for immunizations, and they took care of that matter on their own.

6. The women had *improved the nutritional quality of the food they served their families*. In La Loma and Coripati, through aquaculture and/or greenhousing, the women had increased the protein and/or fresh vegetable content of their families' diets. In all six clubs, women had either heard lectures on food and nutrition, sent young members to attend health and nutrition seminars, or exchanged recipes and talked about the benefits of different foods and food preparation methods. As a result, not only was the present generation of mothers serving more nutritious food, but the youth and children were exposed to more variety and a wider range of tastes. Continued studies would be needed to document the long-term results of these changes.

7. The women had *proved that they were instrumental in changing and improving the educational standards in their families*. In La Loma, Coripati, and Somos, the mothers constructed primary school buildings for their children. In Coripati, adult basic literacy classes were organized and attended by any members of the community who wished to attend; women, men, and youth who had missed the opportunity to learn to read and write before were learning Spanish through the weekly visits of a teacher. In all six

clubs, informal channels for learning new skills and gaining information had broadened the educational horizons of the women and their families. This emphasis on education was achieved by women who knew that they wanted their children to be well-educated; they also desired more education for themselves.

8. The women of La Loma and El Torno *were directly responsible for improving water and/or electric access* in their villages. Women built water storage tanks partly because they had access to the materials they needed. They also exerted pressure to insist that their priorities were met, as water and electricity issues became important to them.
9. The women have *increased their own abilities to deal with their world*. They have learned to manage club activities and resources to achieve the results they want. Such skills became a part of their larger repertoire as they changed their lives in other areas as well.
10. These women have *shown their ability to be creative and adaptive* when they encountered new technologies and new knowledge. They worked with greenhouses and fishponds. They sent club members away for health and agricultural training with the understanding that they would all share new the information and benefit therefrom. They discovered channels whereby government services were open to them if they fulfilled standard conditions, and thus have gained help from doctors, nurses, and teachers in their communities. In short, these women have become more skilled in commanding the resources they have at hand to control their world.
11. The women have *demonstrated to themselves that they can work collectively* to widen the scope of their influence in family and community matters. They have thus increased the impact they have on matters that they consider important, and they have undertaken and

and successfully completed projects that no one of them might have attempted alone.

Summary and Conclusions

The opportunities provided by the mothers' clubs for individuals to grow and for communities to benefit are interactive. The projects and concerns of the women center upon the needs of their families and communities, but empower the women who take part in them. The resourcefulness, energy, and dedication of these women speak well for them as they empower themselves through concern for others by means of the self-help groups they have formed.

There are limitations to this study. Ideally, it would become the first part of a longitudinal study measuring the differences between communities with mothers' clubs and those without. Sociograms measuring self-esteem could help test the range of self-empowerment that occurs. Measurements of food intake might show differences in health and nutrition attributable, at least in part, to the activities of mothers's clubs. Longitudinal studies focused on the health of mothers, number of births, and infant mortality could test the immediate effects of improved health care and long-range shifts in population dynamics in communities with mothers's clubs.

This thesis raises the question of how it is that effective, grassroots, self-help organizations are formed. For development programs in which intervention strategies are prominent, an examination of successful mothers' clubs to determine how they arose and remained effective beyond the completion of their initial projects might lend valuable insights to individuals and communities eyeing different organizational strategies for their own communities. Models for successful intervention by outside agencies might be improved through the study of these spontaneously-arising clubs in Bolivia.

Finally, this study raises the issue of what the natural process for community development is. If people within a community can improve conditions that they identify as needing to be changed, and if they can determine the means by which they can make

changes, is that the "normal" reaction to unsatisfactory standards of health, education, and general well-being? If so, what is it that prevents some communities from fostering voluntary, grassroots efforts that cause conditions to improve, while other communities successfully overcome those same problems?

I think that we will see the process of empowerment for women grow in Bolivia as women and girls continue their involvement in mothers' clubs. Such clubs are not a fading phenomenon, and the women who have participated in them have been insistent and successful in their efforts to maintain grassroots acceptance and control of the clubs. This self-empowerment is helping change the face of Bolivia, especially among the rural poor. The economic freedom that land reform unleashed on the *campesinos* is developing in part through the mothers' clubs that empower their members in irreversible ways. As the daughters of the women now involved in mothers' clubs mature, their improved health and education, their greater self-esteem, and their familiarity with decision-making processes will fuel more development among the *campesinos* of Bolivia.

Endnotes

¹I lived in Bolivia from January 1976 to December 1977. There had been, by local count, some 184 governments in the preceeding 150 years. While change of leadership seemed to directly affect relatively few people in the major cities (La Paz, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Sucre, and Oruro), the frequent turn over of leaders meant that government programs and reforms were extremely limited in their duration and influence.

²For a more complete reading of the history of the 1952-53 land reform in Bolivia, see *Land Reform and Social Revolution in Bolivia* by Dwight B. Heath, Charles J. Erasmus, and Hans C. Buechler, published in 1969 by Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, New York. With the Powelson and Stock (1987) text, a rather complete history emerges on Bolivian land reform to give a reader a good picture of the situation towards the end of the 1980s.

³Consider for a moment a similar case of "land reform." The U. S. government set aside reservation land for the native American Indians. In many cases, the usurpation of native lands ultimately yielded a forced exchange for land unsuitable to any economically productive enterprise: desert for wooded land, infertile for fertile land, and barren, empty spaces for grazing/hunting land. The Native Americans of the United States were left without social or economic assistance, just as the Native Americans of Bolivia were. In both cases, there have been long-term, detrimental effects.

⁴My guide and Quechua/Aymara interpreter, herself born and raised in the *altiplano*, said that some women walk for four hours each way to attend the regular meetings of their mothers' clubs. There is nothing unusual about walking for an hour or more to visit a friend, to complete an errand or marketing transaction, or to fulfill a social obligation. Weekly marketing days bring people together to exchange goods over a wide area.

⁵When we consider that the women in the mothers' clubs have built their own *postas* and clinics, this point is important to remember. Unclaimed land may be used by anyone who begins using it, both in the *altiplano* and on the outskirts of villages and cities. The town of Coripati, which had a mothers' club I visited, was founded in the 1970s by a group of families without any need to buy land or obtain title to it. There are no costs for making one's own sun-dried, adobe bricks. Clay, straw (dried grasses), and water are free to those who will haul them. Time and labor are the two inputs that people must furnish for construction. Bolivia is still a country in which anyone can have a serviceable home if he or she is willing and able to build it.

⁶Because of poor infrastructure and communication in Bolivia at that time, the government could not stop the peasant actions. *Hacienda* owners were afraid to return to the lands they had once controlled through hired managers, and they made few efforts to reclaim plantations. In some cases, landowners or their managers were beaten or killed if they returned to their former holdings (Powelson and Stock, 1987). Ironically, though the government may have failed to provide for a fair redistribution of land rights in some cases, by *not* interfering with the peasant-generated takeover, the government fostered land reform through peasant action.

⁷For readings on the role of participation of women, in particular, in development programs in the late 1970s, refer to these authors and their works:

Dixon, Ruth B. (1978) *Rural Women at Work*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.

Hoskins, Marilyn W. (1980) *Income Generating Activities with Women's Participation*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.

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⁸*ISIS* is an identifying symbol used by the association that publishes *Women's World*, a newsletter published in Geneva, Switzerland, focusing on news of events, groups, and publications about women around the world. *ISIS* is the Goddess of Enchantment, the "divine mother, depicted wearing a solar disk, and her symbol 'The Girdle of Isis' which she wears as an earring. Isis was one of the most significant goddesses of ancient Egypt. She was honored as a loving wife and mother and was often called 'The Great Enchantress.'" This information is found on the Table of Contents page of most issues of *Women's World* that have been published since 1987.

⁹To investigate in particular the activities of Andean women in all parts of Latin America, see De Valasco's (1982) summary of the proceedings of a 1982 congress in Lima, Peru; Pallis's (1977) book on Latin American and Caribbean Women's Collectives; and Bronstein's (1982) book on Latin American Peasant Women.

¹⁰Pinderhughes' definition of empowerment is based on her studies of people in situations of poverty and oppression. Though it comes from observations she has made in the developed world, the people in her studies seem to have some things in common with the women of Bolivia, who are also often trapped in poverty and oppression.

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Glossary

Some of the Spanish words used in the text are translated or defined here.

<i>altiplano</i>	the high Andean plateau of Western Bolivia
<i>caritas</i>	charity
<i>campesina</i>	the Spanish word for an Indian farmer (woman)
<i>campesino</i>	the Spanish word for an Indian farmer (man)
<i>Club de Madres</i>	the name by which mothers' clubs in Bolivia are referred to
<i>conquistadores</i>	the Spanish who conquered 16th century Bolivia
<i>hacienda</i>	the Spanish word that refers to a farmstead
<i>junta vecinal</i>	neighborhood board
<i>mothers' club</i>	an organization made up of women of various ages
<i>peso</i>	unit of money in Bolivia, worth 2.24 dollars when I visited
<i>posta</i>	name for a community center or meeting room
<i>posta medica</i>	a name for a health center
<i>quotas</i>	the dues collected at meetings
<i>sede</i>	name for a community center of meeting room in El Torno
<i>siesta</i>	mid-afternoon rest period in many Latin countries

Appendix A

Specific questions asked in all mothers' clubs

These are the specific questions that I asked in all six mothers' clubs.

1. How was this club formed? In what year did it begin, and what motivated the first members to create it?
2. What are the membership parameters? How many members do you have now? Can new members join?
3. Do the members pay dues? If so, how much and how often do they pay? Who takes care of the treasury? What are the collected moneys used for?
4. How often does the club meet? How was that decided? Where do the members meet? How long does a meeting usually last?
5. Who calls the meeting together? If there are officers, how are they elected? How often are officers elected? How are decisions made in the club? Who carries out club decisions?
6. What has this club achieved? What are its plans for the future in terms of activities needed or already underway?
7. What difficulties have been observed in the way this club operates? What makes you particularly happy about the way the club operates?